

# **Cultural Difference: How race shapes the management of Indigenous tenants within social housing service provision.**



Submitted by

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# Abstract

Mainstream housing service providers are increasingly involved in the provision of housing services to Indigenous tenants, however there has been little investigation of how housing staff manage and experience the intercultural dimension of this. The thesis investigates how service providers construct and understand cultural difference in relation to their own racial identities, and the influence this has on their interactions with Indigenous tenants. Through exploration of racial subjectivities and professional understandings of housing officers this research illuminates the ways in which racial sameness and difference between service providers and Indigenous service users and tenants impacts on social housing service provision at the frontline. The findings suggest that respondents' communication and contact with Indigenous people as well as their capacity and willingness to reflect on and recognise the influence their own race and cultural mores have on their practice are critical factors in shaping their engagement with Indigenous service users and tenants.

The findings have several policy, practice and theoretical implications. They demonstrate how social housing service providers work in the 'space between' their own subjective values, housing policy directives and institutional requirements. This involves negotiating the potential 'risk' that Indigenous cultural demands and responsibilities present for the management of Indigenous tenancies. This 'risk' is framed up within the demands and limitations of mainstream housing policy agendas that require Indigenous tenants to adopt lifestyle choices and behaviours that are more reflective of the broader white society. Findings suggest flexibility for Indigenous cultural practices within policy regulations may ease the tensions and conflicts that are often present for service providers managing Indigenous tenancies. This thesis contributes to theoretical scholarship that places white normative values and assumptions at the centre of Indigenous marginalisation and disadvantage, thereby disrupting unidimensional understandings of race inequality. The inclusion of whiteness as a social category contests its assumptions of being the normative, invisible and often uncontested benchmark for Indigenous peoples to be measured against. Cultural difference can then be conceptualised as axes of differentiation rather than different 'from' the hegemonic standard. This is especially important in the Australian context where white mainstream housing policy objectives, organisational procedures and professional interactions continue to oppress and impact the daily lives and housing outcomes of Indigenous Australians.

## **Declaration of Originality**

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution, except by way of background information and duly acknowledged in the thesis, and to the best of my knowledge and belief no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text of the thesis, nor does the thesis contain any material that infringes copyright.

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Fiona Jan Proudfoot

6th February 2018

## **Publications arising from the Thesis**

Materials relating to some chapters of this thesis have been published, as listed below, in accordance with the University of Tasmania's Guidelines for Incorporating Publication into a Thesis and Authorship of Research Policy.

Proudfoot, F and Habibis, D. (2014) 'Practitioner perspectives on the role of culturally responsive training programs for improving Indigenous tenancies' *Parity* 27(6): 29-30.

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## **Statement of Ethical Conduct**

The Tasmanian Social Sciences HREC Ethics Committee granted Full Committee Ethics Application Approval (H0012915) to this project. The research associated with this thesis abides by international and Australian requirements and was conducted in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

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6th February 2018

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# **1 Race, housing providers and Indigenous tenants**

## **1.1 Introduction**

This thesis explores how racial constructs of difference shape the way social housing service providers interact with and deliver services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients. Mainstream housing service providers are increasingly involved in the provision of housing services to Indigenous tenants, however there has been little investigation into how housing staff manage the intercultural dimension of this. This thesis investigates how service providers construct and understand cultural difference in relation to their own racialised identities, and the influence this has on their interactions with Indigenous tenants.

Investigating the intersections between racial subjectivities, frontline interactions and Indigenous people's tenancy outcomes is crucial in the context of Australia's affordable housing crisis and its broader historic legacy of white-settler colonisation and dispossession of its First Nations peoples. Despite government commitments to ensure Indigenous people have the same housing opportunities as other Australians (National Affordable Housing Agreement 2009), the Australia Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW, 2017: 37) reports that 'Indigenous people are over-represented in homelessness services. In 2015–16, they made up 24% of clients accessing these services, a rate more than 9 times that for non Indigenous Australians'. In this complex web of Indigenous homelessness one line of enquiry that needs empirical attention is the role service providers play in shaping Indigenous people's uptake of housing services and housing outcomes. This is especially important because housing providers hold considerable discretionary power over tenants, with their management of housing directly impacting on Indigenous tenants' housing outcomes.

## **1.2 The unrecognised role of race in Indigenous housing**

Indigenous housing research attests to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's experiences of racism, marginalisation and exclusion from secure affordable housing. The concern of this study was to delve further and explore the role service providers' race identity plays in mitigating or perpetuating Indigenous people's experiences of housing disadvantage. Specifically, this study investigated how social housing service providers' perceptions of their racial identity shape their understandings of cultural differences and the implications this has for their professional interactions with, and housing outcomes for, Indigenous service users and tenants.

From the outset, this thesis draws attention to the race hierarchy evident in Australian society; a hierarchy that perpetuates structural and systemic racial inequality for Indigenous Australians, who are firmly situated at the bottom of the racial hierarchy, and reinforces power and privilege for white Euro-Australians positioned at the top. As Farquharson (2008: 5) argues, ‘Australia’s racial hierarchy is due to the legacy of ... colonialism ... and the strong impact of the racial ideology of white supremacy’. This hierarchy explains, ‘why one group, distinguished by skin colour, culture, or place of origin, differ in life chances to others’ (Walter, 2010: 47). An extensive body of literature attests to the pernicious effects this racial positioning has for Indigenous Australians across areas such as health, education, employment and housing (see Rowley, 1970; Connell, 1977; Tatz, 1979; Westerman, 2004; Sherwood & Edwards, 2006; Saggars & Gray, 2007; Flatau et al., 2009; COAG, 2009; Priest et al., 2011; Milligan et al., 2011; Connell, 2011; Dunn et al., 2011; AIHW, 2011; Memmott et al., 2012; Taylor & Guerin, 2014; Habibis et al., 2016b; Spinney et al., 2016). This thesis argues race privilege and power perpetuate the racial positioning of Indigenous Australians and *sustain* inequalities in one substantial area of Indigenous disadvantage, that of social housing.

### 1.3 White researcher exploring race relations

My epistemological, axiological and ontological standpoints indelibly shape my understandings and interpretations of the race relations explored within this thesis. As a white researcher, I recognise that my standpoints are constructed, in part, by white-settler knowledges and epistemological understandings and my values are inextricably shaped by white cultural norms and practices. These knowledges and values are congruent with and supported by my social position as a white educated woman. The whiteness of my standpoints is visible to me, and it is from this position of clarity that I am committed to examine the role whiteness plays in respondents’ constructions of cultural difference and their interactions with Indigenous service users and tenants.

Applying a whiteness lens challenges the historic trend of the sociological endeavour that is reliant on a unidimensional approach to explore race inequalities. Predominantly, the sociological focus has been on, ‘the differences/shortcomings perceived in the ‘other’ (Aveling, 2006: 263). Effectively this has resulted with the ‘studying down’ of power structures that shape race inequality (Aveling, 2006), rather than the ‘studying up’ of the privileges that construct and perpetuate race privilege and marginalisation. My resolve to

analyse and contest the embedded nature of systemic race inequality, requires me to focus in on how whiteness as a *race*, as a *privilege* and as a *social construct* maintains and perpetuates power for those who are white and oppresses those who are not. My fundamental conviction that disadvantage is not constructed without privilege means I am bound to examine the ideology and power of white race privilege in the construction and maintenance of Indigenous disadvantage and exclusion.

Despite my fundamental resolve to challenge the racialised status quo, it is critically important that I acknowledge that I do this from a position of racial power and privilege. This positioning underpins my sociological endeavour to examine how race constructs understanding of cultural difference.

## 1.4 Indigenous housing outcomes

Much research into Indigenous housing disadvantage comprise data from remote and very remote regions (see Memmott et al., 2012; Habibis et al., 2016a; Moran et al., 2016), whereas studies in urban settings are relative small in comparison. Some urban studies (Milligan et al., 2011; Andersen et al., 2016) suggest Indigenous tenants' low levels of satisfaction with housing services is one of the contributors to high levels of tenancy failure (Milligan et al., 2010; 2011). This is an important consideration with 26 per cent of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders peoples living in social housing tenures on census night 2011 (AIHW, 2014). Conceivably, the service provision milieu has the potential to be instrumental in addressing Indigenous housing insecurity and homelessness. Empirical understandings around the low levels of satisfaction and high levels of Indigenous tenancy failure in mainstream social housing point to the clash between mainstream housing policy and organisational objectives and Indigenous people's cultural practices and obligations (Burke, 2004; Memmott et al., 2012; Milligan et al., 2011; Habibis, 2013). Given the disconnect between mainstream social housing provision and Indigenous cultural practices it is hardly surprising that management of Indigenous tenancies within this milieu often generate tensions and conflict between service providers and Indigenous service users and tenants. While there is some knowledge of the Indigenous people's experience of these conflicts and challenges, more research is needed to investigate how housing providers experience cultural difference and the meanings, understandings and values they derive from these.

It is essential to empirically investigate the interplay between race, service providers' biographies and how these shape their understanding of difference and the impact of these on respondents' professional practice and interactions with Indigenous service users. Furthermore, it is especially important that Indigenous housing research engages with contemporary critical race theories as a way of analysing and making sense of the intersectionality between raced relations at the interface of service provision, and the role this plays in shaping not only housing officers' experiences of service delivery, but also Indigenous people's uptake of services and their subsequent housing outcomes. The following research questions guiding this study address this research gap.

## 1.5 Research Questions

How do social housing service providers understand the relationship between their racial identity and their professional practice in an intercultural context, especially in relation to Indigenous service users and tenants?

1. How do housing service providers perceive their racialised identities and the advantages and disadvantages accruing to this?
2. What role do they perceive this plays in their intercultural professional practice, especially in relation to Indigenous clients?
3. What strategies, if any, do they have to manage the influence of race in the interactions with Indigenous service users?

## 1.6 Placing whiteness within race relations

Missing from many empirical investigations is theoretically informed qualitative research examining the intersectionality between the role of race within the field of social housing, and how respondents' race identity shapes understanding of difference and influences interactions with Indigenous homeless individuals and tenants. This thesis addresses this by including narratives from Indigenous (n=4), Euro-Australian (n=21) and culturally and linguistically diverse (n=6) participants and examines these through the paradigm of whiteness theory to investigate race relations. The inclusion of whiteness within the study's theoretical framework, offers insight into the intersection between race privilege/disadvantage,



hegemony/marginalisation and normativity/alterity at the policy, institutional and individual spheres of social housing service provision.

## 1.7 The argument of the thesis

The thesis argues that Euro-Australian epistemologies, ideologies and mores are the bedrock of Australian society that indelibly shape the social, political, economic and cultural experiences of peoples from Indigenous and cultural minority backgrounds. To empirically investigate the implications of Eurocentric values and practices on the meanings housing providers attribute to their cultural understandings of Indigenous clients, the thesis combines aspects of whiteness theory and Bourdieu's theory of '[(habitus) (capital)] +field = practice' (Bourdieu, 1984:101). Bourdieu's Theory of Practice (1972) contends that 'one's practice is intimately tied to one's habitus, which is tied to one's relative capital, which is tied to the fields in which one operates' (McKnight & Chandler, 2009: 101).

These theories supported the development of my analytical model, The Racial Labyrinth of Subjectivities and Professional Interactions, to provide context around service providers' understandings. The labyrinth aims to capture the inextricable power of race at the personal, professional and interactional level of social housing service provision. Additionally, the thesis contends that white Eurocentric values and assumptions construct the social housing field and service providers' understandings of cultural difference. The understandings are enacted within their interactions and expectations of Indigenous service users and tenant populations.

## 1.8 The findings and contribution of the thesis

The thesis identifies most Euro-Australian respondents rarely reflect on their own race identity, in the main, they do not attribute race to their identity construction (see Chapter 6 & Chapter 7). Therefore, respondents assume their identity as race-less. This creates confusion when participants were asked about the relationship between their racial identity and their professional practice. The only visible race within the intercultural space, for these service providers at least, is the raced Indigenous service users and tenants. Moreover, the universality and invisibility of their own race values and privileges remain firmly embedded and unexamined within their professional interactions. Participants' cognisance of cultural difference, the value they attached to these, generally and more specifically in the context of

social housing provision, together with the narratives they employ to define their understandings establishes their position on the Continuum of Racial Understanding of Difference.

The continuum comprises three key categories that emerged from the thematic analysis: hierarchy, homogeneity and heterogeneity (see Chapter 6). Each category is constituted by the commonalities evidenced in respondents' understandings around cultural differences and whilst the continuum presents separate and discrete dimensions; many respondents' discourses comprise multiple understandings that are spread across and within continuum categories. Numerous discourses overlap and intersect between and within dimensions on the continuum, which emphasise and provide insight into the multidimensional meanings and complexity of understandings that housing providers ascribe to cultural difference. Despite respondents' construction of cultural difference stemming from vastly different ideological positions, for the hierarchy category understandings were predominantly focused on the dichotomous and divisive understandings of difference, and understandings in the homogeneity category focused on similarity and inclusion. Nonetheless, inherent within both categories are intrinsic mono-cultural understandings of cultural difference evidenced by respondents' relying solely on the alterity of Indigenous cultures to construct understandings of difference.

Conversely, for those who understand difference through ideologies of heterogeneity (diversity), their narratives reveal a strong cognisance of the interplay between cultures within frontline interactions (see Chapter 8). Participants share their experiential understandings of race privileges and/or marginalisation. For those from Indigenous or cultural minority backgrounds, they are intimately cognisant of their racial identity and the role it plays within professional interactions. They articulate how being racially 'othered' is instrumental in shaping their interactions with Indigenous service users and tenants. They speak of deep understandings and empathy for those Indigenous tenants caught between the 'choice' of fulfilling their cultural obligations or adhering to mainstream tenancy agreements. These participants recognise the inextricable link between racial marginalisation and racial privilege within both Australian society generally and within social housing service delivery for Indigenous peoples, more specifically.

Respondents' subjective and professional biographies construct an ideological and discursive representation of their understanding of cultural difference. These are mediated by their

experiential knowing of Indigenous people and respondents' capacity to reflect upon their own race, cultural mores and practices. These factors significantly influence how they interact with Indigenous service users and tenants and their choice to apply discretionary power to address issues putting Indigenous tenancies at risk.

In this study, the choices service providers made in exercising discretionary power are reflective of, not one single factor, but the culmination of many (see Chapter 9). The analysis reveals how respondents' subjectivities, professional expertise and organisational demands influence their choice to action discretionary power within their interpretations of policy regulations and organisational directives and tasks. These interpretations are also significantly influenced by the value judgements service providers' attribute to Indigenous tenant populations (Taylor & Kelly, 2006). It is 'precisely in the encounter between different subjectivities, between different values, beliefs and interpretations' (Prior & Barnes, 2011: 268) that service providers demonstrate how their positions of power are constructed by 'insitutional forces that ... [hold] ... sway over them and cultural renderings of worthiness they ... [carry] ... with them' (Prior & Barnes, 2011: 268; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2012).

The thesis showcases how social housing service providers work in the 'space between' housing policy directives, institutional requirements and Indigenous tenants adhering to cultural obligations and demands. The thesis brings to light how participants' racial subjectivities and professional biographies shape understandings of cultural difference and the way they interact with Indigenous service users and tenants. By contributing to the broader scholarship that holds the normative values and assumptions of whiteness accountable within the construction of Indigenous marginalisation and disadvantage, this thesis disrupts unidimensional understandings of race inequality by examining the multidimensional nature of racial interactions within social housing service provision.

## 1.9 Structure of the thesis

Chapter Two begins by highlighting the role of culture in service delivery and the need for adaptive services to address Indigenous housing needs. It establishes the vital role race plays within housing service provision and housing officers' interactions with Indigenous service users and tenant populations. The chapter profiles Indigenous housing and examines issues such as homelessness and crowding. Furthermore, it details Indigenous people's reliance on

the social housing sector and explores the role discrimination, the affordable housing crisis and cultural difference play in explaining this. The chapter explores how the intersection between structural and cultural factors is critical to Indigenous housing outcomes and reviews social housing policy and the impact of mainstreaming Indigenous social housing options. It discusses the increasingly conditional nature of policy and the punitive measures adopted to deal with breaches of tenancy agreements. In addition, the role of discretionary power to navigate the conditional nature of housing policy directives and the punitive measures to address issues putting Indigenous tenancy at risk are discussed. The chapter concludes by highlighting how the literature is relatively silent on the role of race in service provision and points to the importance of understanding cultural difference in the delivery of culturally responsive services to address Indigenous housing needs.

Chapter Three provides an overview of Australia's race relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. It presents the tenets of whiteness theory and argues for the inevitability of race to privilege Euro-Australians. It provides a critique of whiteness theory and the rationale for the inclusion of Bourdieu's social theory to construct a conceptual framework to provide some context around respondents' subjectivities and sensibilities.

Chapter Four discusses the theoretical framework, methodology and empirical methods supporting the study. The chapter explains the development of the conceptual model, The Racialised Labyrinth of Subjectivities and Professional Practice that was employed to analyse interview data and showcase the role race plays within respondents' subjective understandings and professional practice. The chapter defines key concepts and outlines a commitment to interpretative constructionism to explore the everyday understandings respondents ascribe to their professional interactions. It provides an overview of the significant, practical and methodological rationale for using in-depth interviews as an empirical research strategy. The chapter details the methods employed to operationalise the research questions and concludes by providing a profile of participants.

Chapter Five profiles and defines the social housing fields under investigation. This chapter systematically explores the unique challenges presented by the type and location of housing organisations; these being state, community or Indigenous housing organisations in metropolitan and regional areas. Furthermore, the role of organisational culture and the demographics of the staff, together with their professional experience and training are discussed. An extensive examination of administrative expectations and task requirements

provide insights into the high demands placed on social housing providers to perform their role. The conflict and tension arising from working in the ‘space between’ policy requirements and Indigenous tenants’ cultural needs are explored in detail. The chapter also discusses the restrictions that mainstream housing policies, tenancy agreements and organisational requirements placed upon service providers when dealing with Indigenous cultural needs and practices. Furthermore, it examines the emotional challenges for respondents in enforcing white cultural expectations upon Indigenous tenants. This chapter draws attention to the highly complex and demanding nature of service provision, and provides insight into how service providers’ racial subjectivities provide an extra layer to the many factors shaping interactions at the frontline. Finally, participant’s access to and evaluation of culturally responsive training programs (CRTP) are explored to describe how effective respondents deem these are in skilling them to provide culturally responsive services to Indigenous service users and tenants.

Chapter Six presents the Continuum of Racial Understanding of Difference and defines each of its categories. It then goes on to explore the understandings forming the hierarchy category. Understandings within this category involve an uncritical assumption white Euro-Australian values, behaviours and aspirations were the cultural normative standard. Cultural difference was seen through a problematising lens in which white hegemonic norms are applied to understanding of the Indigenous other whose behaviours and values were often constructed as in opposition to white culture. This involves a hierarchal approach to cultural difference which locates white cultural ideologies as superior to Indigenous ones and often applies ideas of deficit and pejorative assumptions to the tensions and conflicts experienced in the management of Indigenous tenancies. These ideas are bolstered by a disregard for the importance of cultural values and mores for Indigenous peoples, and their significance for housing access and maintaining tenancy.

Chapter Seven explores the understandings that form the homogeneity category. It examines how the homogeneity category is characterised by beliefs in egalitarianism, equal opportunities and sameness. There is an assumption that all Australians have equal access to opportunities, so cultural difference is deemed to be of little consequence. The chapter explains how these understandings often mean respondents unwittingly overlook the profound consequences of social, political, economic and cultural inequality, and the effects these have on Indigenous homeless and tenant populations’ ability to access resources and negotiate housing outcomes. The chapter reveals how at the micro-interactional level most

respondents are deeply motivated to help address Indigenous people's explicit disadvantage within the field of social housing provision by enacting respectful, empathetic and considered interpersonal interactions. This chapter concludes by drawing attention to the commonalities in respondents' personal and professional biographies, whilst bringing powerful insights into the *invisibility* of race within the interactional space of service provision.

Chapter Eight explores the final category on the continuum and details how respondents' understanding of cultural difference form the heterogeneity category. The chapter explores how respondents' cognisance of Indigenous cultural is understood in relation to white culture, not separate from it. Respondents recognise the importance, vibrancy and impact of cultural diversity as a source of privilege and marginalisation. The privilege and dominance of white cultural hegemony and values are exposed and contrasted with the mores and responsibilities related to Indigenous cultures. Indigenous traditions and obligations are legitimated in these respondents' understanding of cultural issues involved in their interaction with Indigenous tenants. The category is premised on beliefs that culture is intrinsically valuable to Indigenous people's identity and their daily lives. Understandings also include explorations of the imposition of white cultural expectations on Indigenous populations and how these contribute, maintain and help to explain Indigenous disadvantage and housing exclusion.

Chapter Nine details the similarities and differences in how respondents choose to use their discretionary power. The findings provide a glimpse of the complexities inherent within service providers' day-to-day frontline practice and the role race plays in their interactions with Indigenous service users and tenants. The chapter reveals how all the factors inherent in respondents' subjective and professional biographies significantly influence how they enact rule discretion, task discretion and value discretion. The choices service providers make around these play a crucial role in the way they engage with Indigenous tenants and how they navigate and negotiate tensions and conflicts within their management of Indigenous tenancy issues.

Chapter Ten concludes the thesis by examining the nexus between the social housing fields and how respondents manage race in their professional practice and interactions with Indigenous service users and tenants. It restates the key arguments and main findings and explores the implications of the study. Furthermore, it discusses the potential limitations of the study and concludes by examining future research directions.

## **2 Understanding Indigenous housing**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter illuminates the role of culture in shaping housing service providers' interactions with Indigenous clients. The literature explored in this chapter shows how Indigenous cultural practices, behaviours and norms are deemed problematic for service providers in their management of Indigenous mainstream housing tenures. The chapter begins with a profile of Indigenous people's homelessness and housing tenures in remote, regional and urban Australia, and showcases Indigenous Australian's heavy reliance on the social housing sector to provide accommodation. It then reveals some of the key structural factors, including the affordable housing crisis and the impact race discrimination and disadvantage play for Indigenous peoples and their housing outcomes. Additionally, it explores how Indigenous cultural practices, such as family and mutual reciprocity and demand sharing, create challenges for securing and sustaining mainstream tenancy agreements. The chapter explicates how these structural and cultural factors intersect, and examines the problems arising from the conditional nature of mainstream housing policies and tenancy agreements. It investigates the increasingly punitive approach adopted by many housing service providers to address tenancy breaches and the vulnerability for Indigenous cultural practices and behaviours to conflict with these.

The key argument weaved throughout this chapter is that at the micro-interactional level service providers play a critical role in Indigenous tenants' housing options and outcomes. Previous research (Laffin, 1986; Kemp & Williams, 1991; Cole & Furbey, 1994; Franklin & Clapham, 1997; Clapham et al., 2000; Furbey et al., 2001; Casey & Allen, 2004; Clapham, 2004; Casey, 2005; Lipsky, 1980; Taylor & Kelly, 2006; Brodtkin: 2012; Hoyle, 2014) around professional identity and discretionary power set the scene for understanding the complex interplay between organisational culture, professional expertise and practice, and frontline interactions. At the structural level a review of the mainstreaming of Indigenous housing services brings to light the consequence this has for Indigenous people's procurement and sustainment of social housing tenancies. It is argued the cultural divide between mainstream policy and institutional directives and Indigenous people's cultural obligations perpetuate the tension that is often present at the interactional space of social housing service provision. This policy/culture divide often places Indigenous tenants in the

unenviable position of ‘choosing’ either to adhere to their cultural norms and obligations or conform to the demands of their service providers to fulfil the requirements of their tenancy agreements. Indigenous population’s high dependency on social housing establishes the role of social housing providers as instrumental in meeting Indigenous housing needs, making the investigations of the intersection between cultural difference vitally important in the understandings of Indigenous housing outcomes. Finally, the chapter concludes by highlighting the absence of empirical research into the role of race in social housing service delivery and Indigenous people’s housing outcomes.

## 2.2 Profile of Indigenous homelessness

The following sections explore the rates of Indigenous homelessness, how Indigenous homelessness is defined and operationalised by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), and the specific cultural factors contributing to Indigenous people’s experiences of homelessness. The ABS cross-census data analysis from 2001, 2006, 2011, clearly and consistently demonstrates that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are far more likely to experience homelessness than their non-Indigenous counterparts (AIHW, 2014b). On census night 2011, one in 20 Indigenous people were homeless, 14 times the rate of non-Indigenous people’s experiences of homelessness (one in 284 people; AIHW, 2014b: vi). The data suggest that Indigenous peoples comprise 28 per cent of the total homeless population with 26,743 Indigenous people reported homeless on census night 2011. Whilst these statistics are deeply troubling, they may not encompass the full extent of Indigenous people’s experiences of homelessness, due in part to the difficult task of defining and operationalising the concept of Indigenous homelessness.

The ABS’ definition of homelessness is constructed for the general population (see ABS, 2012) and, by its own admission, this definition does not adequately capture additional aspects of homelessness from an Indigenous perspective (AIHW, 2014b). This thesis sits alongside propositions that Indigenous Australian experiences of homelessness are related to their history, beliefs and values, and include notions of spiritual homelessness and public place dwelling. Spiritual homelessness and public place dwelling are additional aspects of Indigenous homelessness that are generally not attributed to the non-Indigenous homeless population. Spiritual homelessness is defined ‘as the state of being disconnected from one’s homeland, separation from family or kinship networks, or not being familiar with one’s heritage’ (AIHW, 2014b: 5). Public place dwelling is defined as a group of people, usually



Indigenous Australians, who are living on the outskirts of a major centre (AIHW, 2014b: 5). To define and capture the rate of Indigenous homelessness the ABS is conducting research into how its statistical definition of homelessness may be understood in the Indigenous Australian context (AIHW, 2014b). This has led to the ABS definition of homelessness to include crowding where, ‘people living in severe overcrowding are considered to be in the sixth ABS homeless group’ (ABS, 2011). The ABS (2011) states:

People living in severe overcrowding are considered to be homeless because they do not have control of, or access to space for social relations. In extremely overcrowded dwellings inhabitants are generally unable to pursue social relations, or have personal (i.e. family or small group) living space, or maintain privacy, nor do different family/groups within the dwelling have exclusive access to kitchen facilities and a bathroom.

Furthermore, consultations with Indigenous peoples and service providers around Indigenous understandings of home and homelessness, showcase how many Indigenous peoples understand homelessness in relation to place (AIHW, 2014b). This is particularly evident in regional and remote areas, where Indigenous people consider themselves homeless when their dwelling is not located ‘on country’ or in their community (AIHW, 2014b). Some Indigenous people report that to avoid disconnection from country, they may live in crowded conditions, or sleep outside or in improvised dwellings to stay on country rather than moving to suitable housing in another area. Within communities where kinship and cultural ties are identified as strong, homelessness is often understood as being disconnected from family. Conversely, if Indigenous peoples are with immediate and extended family, home can be somewhere other than their usual place of residence (AIHW, 2014b). Additionally, Indigenous people are often mobile, connecting them to multiple communities with many having more than ‘one usual address where they feel at home’ (AIHW, 2014b: 6).

All of these factors demonstrate how Indigenous homelessness is both qualitatively and quantitatively different from non-Indigenous homelessness ‘in terms of its form, nature, context, causes and visibility’ (Keys Young, 1998; Berry et al., 2001; ABS, 2001; Memmott & Fantin, 2001; Memmott et al., 2003: iii). While both Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups may not have shelter, or be at risk of losing the shelter they do have, a larger portion of Indigenous people occupy accommodation that is substandard, that does not meet their physical and/or cultural needs and puts their health at risk (Memmott et al., 2003). These factors are discussed in detail within this chapter. The following table provides an overview

of how many Indigenous individuals were reported as homeless across locations on census night 2011.

**Table 2-1: Indigenous homeless population across locations**

Location	Indigenous homelessness
Major Cities	12%
Inner Regional	6%
Outer Regional	11%
Remote	10%
Very Remote	60%

Source: AIHW (2014b)

Of those Indigenous peoples who were homeless across all location just over half, 51 per cent, were female and ‘four in 10 (42 per cent) were aged 18 or under’ (AIHW, 2014b: 12). The following table differentiates the types of homelessness experienced by Indigenous homeless individuals on census night 2011.

**Table 2-2: Types of homelessness experienced by Indigenous homeless individuals**

Homeless individuals (N)	Percentage of homeless pop.	Type of homelessness
1, 677	6.3	Improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out
3,282	12.3	Supported accommodation for the homeless
1,011	3.8	Staying temporarily with other households
678	2.5	In boarding houses
41	0.2	In other temporary lodgings
20,054	75	In severely crowded dwellings

Source: AIHW (2014b: 9).

Approximately 20, 054, (75 per cent), of the homelessness Indigenous population are seeking shelter in severely crowded dwelling (‘a dwelling that needs four or more extra bedrooms to accommodate the people who usually live there according to the Canadian Occupancy

Standard ABS, 2012c', cited AIHW, 2014a: 17). This poses significant challenges for the social housing sector and service providers enforcing the rules of mainstream tenancy agreements. In Queensland, the social housing milieu is regulated by the Housing Act 2003 and the Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act (RTRAA)2008. The Housing Act (2003: 10) states the following as its key objectives:

- (a) to improve the access of Queenslanders to safe, secure, appropriate and affordable housing; and
- (b) to help build sustainable communities.

Whereas, the Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act (2008) stipulates the legislative regulations in which tenants, lessors and agents must comply.

- 1) The main objectives of this Act are to state the rights and obligations of -
  - (a) tenants, lessors and agents for residential tenancies; and
  - (b) residents, providers and agents for rooming accommodation
- 2) The objects are mainly achieved by –
  - a) regulating the making, content, operation and ending of residential tenancy agreements and rooming accommodation agreements; and
  - b) providing for the resolution of disputes about residential tenancy agreements and rooming accommodation agreements; and
  - c) providing for the authority to receive, hold and pay rental bonds; and
  - d) providing for the compliance of the Act to be monitored and enforced; and
  - e) providing for the establishment, functions and powers of the authority (RTRAA, 2008: 26-27).

The legislative rules within both the Housing Act (2003) and the RTRAA (2008) govern mainstream housing service provision and those tenants within the social housing sector. As Jones et al., (2014:44) point out:

Public housing tenancy management policies and practices have operated within this overall legislative framework since 1994. However, the manner of implementation of

these policies in public and community housing have been heavily influenced by recognition and broad acceptance that public and community housing providers have responsibilities as ‘social landlords’ (Heyward 1996) and that they are the ‘housing tenure of last resort’ for disadvantaged Queenslanders.

This next section details the characteristics of those Indigenous people who are housed in social housing, demonstrating the crucial role of social housing in providing accommodation for many Indigenous peoples.

### 2.2.1 Social housing tenures

Census data 2011 shows that of the estimated 209,000 Indigenous households around 59 per cent of households rented their homes. Twenty nine percent were private renters; 26 per cent lived in social housing and four per cent rented from another type of landlord (AIHW, 2014a). The following table presents the percentage of Indigenous households renting within the social housing sector in 2011, across locations.

**Table 2-3: Indigenous household and social housing tenures**

Regions	2011
Major cities	21.9%
Inner regional	19.7%
Outer regional	24.0%
Remote	39.9%
Very remote	69.9%

Source: AIHW, 2014a

Social housing tenants comprise those who are renting from state or territory public housing providers as well as mainstream community housing and Indigenous community housing organisations (AIWH, 2014a). Data from the Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing (AIHW, 2014a) estimate that in 2013, 31 per cent of Indigenous households live in social housing. Comparable data reveals:

Indigenous households were 6 times as likely as other Australian households to live in social housing (rates of 31% and 5%, respectively). Public housing was the largest

provider of social housing to Indigenous households, with about 30,800 Indigenous households living in such housing at 30 June 2013—a rate of 14% of Indigenous households. Indigenous community housing was the second largest provider—8% of Indigenous households lived in such housing at 30 June 2013. Available data suggest that almost 1 in 5 (18%) new allocations to social housing in 2012–13 were to Indigenous households (AIHW, 2014a:vi).

For those Indigenous households in very remote and remote areas 57 per cent live in social housing; seven out of 10 households in very remote areas were in social housing and 40 per cent of Indigenous households in remote areas rented social housing (AIHW, 2014a). Additionally, these households experienced high levels of overcrowding, with 46 per cent of Indigenous households in very remote areas considered overcrowded and 31 per cent in remote areas are considered overcrowded.

The Canadian National National Occupancy Standard (CNOS) considers the composition and the size of a household, with a household deemed overcrowded if there are more than two people per bedroom; if children of opposite sex over the age of five are sharing a bedroom; and if a person over the age of 18, parents or couples do not have their own bedroom (ABS, 2011; AIHW, 2014a). Alarming, on census night 2011, almost 24,700 Indigenous households were considered to be overcrowded. The rates of overcrowding varied according to housing tenure with 23 per cent of social housing households deemed to be overcrowded, the highest rate of all tenure types (AIHW, 2014a).

Census data 2011, also distinguishes overcrowding rates within jurisdictions; with Queensland having the largest number of overcrowded Indigenous households (7,351) followed by New South Wales (6,754). The Northern Territory had the highest rate of overcrowding among households, 38 per cent; followed by Western Australia, 16 per cent; and Queensland, 14 per cent (AIHW, 2014a). The following table was constructed through AIHW analyses of unpublished data of ABS Census 2011.

**Table 2-4: Overcrowded Indigenous households and Indigenous people, by state and territory**

	<b>HOUSEHOLDS</b>		<b>PEOPLE<sup>(a)</sup></b>	
<b>State/Territory</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Per cent <sup>(b)</sup></b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Per cent</b>
New South Wales	6,754	9.9	23,464	16.1
Victoria	1,510	9.0	4,299	13.4
Queensland	7,351	13.6	33,015	25.4
Western Australia	3,105	15.6	16,532	30.8
South Australia	1,215	10.7	5,319	21.5
Tasmania	561	6.4	1,742	10.1
Australian Capital Territory	156	6.9	543	12.4
Northern Territory	4,037	37.5	30,581	65.5
<b>Australia <sup>(c)</sup></b>	<b>24,697</b>	<b>12.9</b>	<b>115,558</b>	<b>25.4</b>

(a) Includes usual residents (that is, excludes visitors) in occupied private dwellings.

(b) Only those households for which the level of crowding could be determined are included.

(c) Includes 'Other territories'. Source: AIHW analyses of unpublished data from the ABS 2011 Census (AIHW, 2014a: 22).

The next section examines some of the structural and cultural factors that contribute to Indigenous people's reliance on the social housing sector to support them with affordable accommodation. It demonstrates the structural issues, such as the affordable housing crisis, together with the impact race discrimination and disadvantage evident in the private rental sector play in Indigenous housing outcomes; and then further explores how Indigenous cultural practices and obligations create challenges for securing and sustaining mainstream tenancy agreements.

## 2.3 Structural explanations for Indigenous housing profile

Indigenous disadvantage has been shown to have both immediate economic, social and cultural determinants, and deeper underlying causes. For example, the relatively high rates of homelessness for Indigenous individuals and families are potentially influenced by immediate factors such as mental health issues, alcohol and drug use, unemployment, poverty, and domestic and family violence within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities (Birdsall-Jones et al., 2010; SCRGSP, 2014). Research claims that ‘deeper underlying causes’, including ‘intergenerational trauma resulting from the ongoing and cumulative effects of colonisation, loss of land, language and culture, the erosion of cultural and spiritual identity, forced removal of children, and racism and discrimination’ (Bryant 2009; Clapham et al., 2006; HREOC 1997: cited in SCRGSP, 2014: 17), maintain and reproduce Indigenous disadvantage. The complex intersectionality between multiple levels of disadvantage accompany many Indigenous peoples accessing housing within the social housing system.

At 30 June 2013, the social housing sector assisted almost 63,000 Indigenous households. The largest program providing social housing assistance for Indigenous Australians was not a targeted, Indigenous-specific program but public rental housing. Public housing accommodated ‘30,774 Indigenous households, (nine per cent of all public rental housing households)-a slight decrease from 10 per cent of households at 30 June 2012. In contrast, mainstream community housing provided housing assistance to fewer Indigenous households (4,640 Indigenous households or 7% of all mainstream-community housing households)’ (AIHW, 2014c: 36). Successive studies (Milligan et al., 2011; AIHW, 2014a; Brackertz, et al., 2016; Johnson et al., 2015; Wood et al., 2015; Moran et al., 2016) determine Indigenous people’s reliance on social housing can partially be explained by geographic factors, high population and household growth. In addition, cultural and social differences, tight housing markets, higher level of unmet demand for affordable housing, weak labour markets, exclusion from labour markets and subsequent lower than average income effectively create affordability barriers for Indigenous people’s opportunities of home ownership or procuring accommodation in the private rental market. These factors are exacerbated further by the continuing high demand of social housing and supply failing to keep up with the demand (AIHW, 2014c).

Milligan et al.'s (2011: 1) study into the provision of social housing for Indigenous households within urbanised areas in Australia- 'where an estimated 80 per cent of Indigenous social housing tenants live' - report that the existing evidence demonstrates the need for social housing service models to be substantially improved in order to better address the diverse and distinct needs of Indigenous households in urban and regional areas. The research literature showcases how 'the overall level of resources allocated for both new supply and maintaining housing over the long term has not been commensurate with needs (AIHW, 2009a)' (Milligan et al., 2011: 13-14). In addition, they report Indigenous tenants in public housing experience lower levels of satisfaction with their service provision than non-Indigenous public housing tenants, and higher rates of eviction (Flatau et al., 2009; SCRGSP, 2010).

One explanation for the significant barriers Indigenous people face in accessing affordable housing tenures, is due to the prevailing presence of discrimination toward Indigenous people in both the private rental and social housing sectors (Read, 2000; Hansen & Roche, 2003; EOC, 2004; Morgan, 2006; Prout, 2008; Milligan et al., 2011; Andersen et al., 2016). Two enquiries, conducted by the Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) in Western Australia, into Indigenous peoples experience of discrimination in both the public (see Finding a Place; an inquiry into the existence of discriminatory practices in relation to the provision of public housing and related services to Aboriginal people in Western Australia, 2004 report); and private sectors (see Accommodating Everyone; The inquiry into whether persons from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and Aboriginal people are being discriminated against on the basis of their race either directly or indirectly in the private housing rental market 2011 report), determine that race is a significant factor in the discrimination that Indigenous peoples experience in both settings.

Andersen et al.'s (2016) research examining the housing and health experiences of Aboriginal people living in Western Sydney found that discrimination from real estate agents and owners was repeatedly described by participants as a key barrier to accessing housing. Some respondents recall how they were incorrectly told there were no available properties to rent, whilst others submitted numerous unsuccessful applications. Additionally, respondents perceived that social housing was the only option for much of the Aboriginal community, despite social housing being described as hard to access, with waiting periods of up to 15 years reported. The chronic shortage of affordable housing also meant participants in the study felt unable to insist that their housing met basic standards.



Much of the literature examining Indigenous people's experience of discrimination in the private rental and social housing terrain clearly demonstrates the relational nature between Indigenous cultural demands and practices and experiences of discrimination and racism within service provision. The following sections look at some of the cultural mores and practices that are often deemed problematic for both Indigenous individuals accessing and sustaining tenancies, and housing service providers managing Indigenous tenancies.

## 2.4 Culture difference and its role in Indigenous housing

The value, strength and priority of Indigenous mores in relation to their culture, family and spirituality is 'well known in multicultural Australia, yet remains a barrier to maintain housing without societal conflict' (Hansen & Roche, 2003, cited in Prout, 2008: 11). Indigenous cultures comprises a multitude of diverse understandings, practices and behaviours, however, the commonalities between different cultural groups lie in the value most Indigenous peoples place on kinship and family relationships, and 'their physical and emotional bonds to country, and connecting to the spirit of their ancestors' (SNAICC, 2011)'(CFCA, 2014). For many Indigenous people, culture:

is built around a "collectivist" kinship system, meaning that people think of themselves in terms of their affiliation with other people and their community (Yeo, 2003). The kinship system is a dynamic and complex social structure that defines how individuals relate to each other in terms of their roles, responsibilities and obligations (SNAICC, 2011)(CFCA, 2014).

Most Euro-Australians belong to a highly individualist culture, where people's responsibilities are to themselves and their immediate families (Hofstede, 2001). Conversely, for many Indigenous Australians caring and supporting kin is a critical social obligation that gives rise to a culture of reciprocity. These are central to the kinship system and structures, not only personal relationships but economic, social and political relations as well (Birdsall-Jones et al., 2010; Habibis et al., 2016b). Indigenous people's cultural obligations play out significantly in their housing career as, 'those in need of housing ... will most often resolve this need by approaching their kinfolk prior to considering any other means of finding shelter. Most often, their housed kinfolk will take them in' (Birdsall-Jones et al., 2010: 8). The existing evidence points to how this can create obstacles for Indigenous tenants maintaining mainstream housing tenures. The presence of visitors often threatens the stability of households through potential breaches in tenancy agreements because of crowding, as well as

visitor and tenant behaviour leading to neighbour complaints, and demand-sharing that reduces household budgets and tenants' capacity to maintain their rental payments (Habibis, 2007; Birdsall-Jones et al., 2010). In Prout's (2008: 8) research she determined:

Visitors and the overcrowded conditions they produce are a common cause of tenancy failure for Aboriginal people ... placing strain on resources of existing tenants ... unpaid fees often lead to debt accumulation, eviction, and preclusion from re-entering the public housing system until debts have been cleared. Evicted tenants usually seek alternate accommodation with other relatives, producing further crowding and further mobility.

Increasingly, much of Indigenous housing literature present the detrimental effects of crowded Indigenous households on the emotional, social and physical wellbeing of Indigenous individuals and families (see Gordon et al., 2002; Gray et al., 2013). However, some research moves against the grain by suggesting, 'it certainly cannot be assumed that high household densities regarded as 'crowded' by non-Aboriginal standards are necessarily perceived as stressful by Aboriginal groups' (Memmott, 1991: 262; Memmott et al., 2006: 12). These households are often perceived as supporting Indigenous cultural practices and sociality and play an integral role for some Indigenous families who prefer to live communally (Prout, 2008). The points of contention occur when housing service provision fail to recognise the importance of Indigenous communitarian values, the mobility patterns of some Indigenous peoples, their kin networks and web of cultural obligations, which often encompass housing and economic support for extended family members (Burke, 2004; Memmott et al., 2006). Understandings around Indigenous cultural obligations and mobility patterns are essential for service providers in order for them to provide a variety of services and make positive interventions in Indigenous homeless people's lives (Peters & Kem, 2016).

## 2.5 Challenges arising from Indigenous temporary mobility patterns

Many housing researchers shed light on the challenges Indigenous mobility practices have for the management of Indigenous tenancies. Hansen and Roche (2003) draw attention to the dissonance between the Indigenous 'fluid family that shares and travels and expands and contracts according to the family needs and events; in conflict with a system that requires an ideal of family stability' (Hansen & Roche 2003, cited in Prout 2008:11). Supporting Hansen

and Roche's contention, Habibis et al. (2011:12) found 'the policies and practices of social housing providers take little account of the temporary mobility of Indigenous populations' despite the challenges it creates for Indigenous peoples and service providers. They further contend:

The temporary mobility of Indigenous individuals and families is not in itself a problem ... the real 'problem' of Indigenous temporary mobility is that much of it is forced, arising from, and being maintained by, an unenviable mix of severe housing shortage, structural disadvantage, cultural difference and poverty, mixed in with substance use, and vulnerability to the vagaries of government policy (Habibis et al., 2011: 4).

For service providers, some of the key problems arising from Indigenous temporary mobility practices manifest when increased numbers of visitors at a property lead to neighbour complaints. Furthermore, when mobility practices culminate in tenants leaving properties without notifying service providers, this also creates challenges for managing Indigenous tenancies (Habibis et al., 2011). Extensive studies (Memmott et al., 2004; Habibis et al., 2011; Milligan et al., 2011; Moran et al., 2016) examine the many challenges that visitors pose for Indigenous tenants in keeping with the tenancy rules. For example, anti-social behaviour (ASB), including alcohol and substance abuse, fighting and loud noise is largely associated with Indigenous visitors and often leads to neighbours complaining. In addition, crowding together with ASB may result in family violence, and these factors culminate in the physical damage and deterioration of the property, through wilful damage and excessive use (Moran et al., 2016). Despite the many potential problems arising from visitors' anti-social behaviours, tenants often suggest they are bound to kin and will not say no to accommodating them despite the 'risk' to their tenancy (Habibis et al., 2016a). These empirical findings attest to the strength of Indigenous kinship ties and cultural obligations.

While literature points to the contested terrain between Indigenous cultural mores and practices and social housing service provision, many questions remain unanswered as to how service providers negotiate this terrain and what strategies, if any, they put in place to address cultural difference 'risking' Indigenous tenancies. The following section details the changing face of Indigenous housing policy and demonstrates how current mainstream policy objectives potentially hinder service providers' engagement with, and ability to provide, culturally responsive service provision for Indigenous homeless individuals and social

housing tenants. It then goes on to explore questions such as how is discretionary power utilised by service providers to address tenancy problems associated with cultural responsibilities, and how does this shape frontline interactions and housing outcomes for Indigenous peoples. This is an important consideration as the literature remains largely silent on how housing officers' choice to enact discretion to negotiate cultural differences within their professional practice shapes their interactions with Indigenous service users and outcomes for Indigenous tenants.

## 2.6 The changing face of housing policy and the mainstreaming of Indigenous social housing

Prior to 2006, Indigenous people's social housing, in addition to mainstream public and community housing, was provided through two Indigenous-specific housing strands; 'the State Owned and Managed Indigenous Housing program (SOMIH) and Indigenous Community Housing Organisations (ICHOs) and, in New South Wales Aboriginal Community Housing Providers' (Habibis et al., 2011: 30). This changed with the demise of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Council (ATSIC) in 2005, which resulted in separate SOMIH housing programs subsumed into a single public housing system with single waiting lists. This has resulted in a significant shift in the management of Indigenous tenants, as historically Indigenous specific housing (either SOMIH or ICHOs) where policies, organisational values, practices and staff were adapted to and aligned with Indigenous cultural values and norms, and generally provided more flexible and personal service provision to Indigenous tenants. Increasing numbers of Indigenous households now live in mainstream public housing because of the shrinking ICHO sector and 'the mainstreaming of urban Indigenous social housing and the tenancy management reforms in remote communities' (Moran et al., 2016: 29).

Research consistently demonstrates that mainstream housing systems impact 'disproportionally on Indigenous tenants because of cultural and lifestyle practices and norms in areas such as kinship obligations and mobility' (Moran et al., 2016: 29). In addition, studies clearly identify how mainstream service providers cannot 'easily respond to the level of change and spontaneity' that many Indigenous families encounter 'nor comprehend the confusion and despair of Indigenous tenants struggling to comply with rules' (Hansen & Roche, 2003: 5). Moran et al. (2016: 29) report on the 'trend towards increased control of tenants' behaviour through tenancy management (Hunter et al. 2005)' within mainstream policy objectives. This has been evidenced through the introduction of ASB in social housing

policies, which have been strengthened ‘progressively with three strike policies introduced from around 2011(WA 2011, NT 2012, Vic 2012, Qld 2013, Tas 2015)’.

In most jurisdictions, the three strikes policies have only applied to urban public housing (Moran et al., 2016: 29-30). The effects of ASB policies are well established in reports from both WA and Queensland that suggest they ‘impact disproportionately on Indigenous households and lead to household instability due to forced exits from social housing (EOC, 2004)’. A recent Queensland study investigating the impact of ASB policies, conducted by Jones et al., (2014: 63, cited in Moran et al., 2016: 30), found that Indigenous households are ‘extremely over-represented with 176 of these households issued with multiple or serious breaches out of the 369 households in total (47.7%). It suggested that this reflected ‘inappropriate application of the policy to Indigenous households’ and potential ‘discrimination against Indigenous households by either neighbours or housing workers’ (Moran et al., 2016: 30).

The increasingly conditional nature of mainstream Indigenous housing policies place especially tight demands on Indigenous people’s behaviours and lead to, in many cases, increasingly punitive approaches being adopted by many service providers in their attempt to manage the impact of Indigenous cultural practices on tenancy outcomes. Indigenous people’s housing outcomes are often affected by mainstream services that do not legitimate the importance of, or adapt to Indigenous cultural realities. Milligan et al., (2011: 49) suggest:

appreciation of, and respect for [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander] identity and cultural values and understanding the implications of cultural norms and life styles for housing aspirations and the variety of needs and living patterns ... is the fundamental starting point for designing and delivering housing service responses.

Milligan et al.’s (2011) study highlights the need for culturally sensitive services to be implemented in service delivery to Indigenous tenants. Despite the significant policy push for culturally appropriate frameworks (see SA Government, 2006; COAG, 2009; AHRC, 2012) to be implemented within service provision for Indigenous tenants, much of the housing literature suggests Indigenous peoples do not experience culturally sensitive service provision within the mainstream social housing sector. Many factors shape the interface of service

delivery and housing outcomes for Indigenous clients, including service provider's use of discretionary power to negotiate the competing demands between tenancy agreements and Indigenous tenants' cultural responsibilities. The next section explores the intersection between discretionary power and service providers' professional identity to understand how these influence interactions with Indigenous service users and tenants.

## 2.7 Professional identity and service providers' discretionary power

Discretionary power is inextricably linked to frontline professional practice, which poses significant challenges when examining service providers' professional practice and their use of discretionary power. This is primarily because there is an enduring ambiguity surrounding the notion of 'professionalism' in the social housing field. Some housing researchers (Laffin, 1986; Kemp & Williams, 1991; Cole & Furbey, 1994; Franklin & Clapham, 1997; Clapham et al., 2000; Furbey et al., 2001; Casey & Allen, 2004; Clapham, 2004; Casey, 2005) suggest there is 'no clearly delineated professional role in housing' (Casey, 2008: 766; Clapham et al., 2000) and therefore no adequate definition to describe the role of housing management as an occupation. This obfuscation surrounding the role has created a perennial debate focusing on the polarisation of whether housing management is primarily about the business of managing properties or managing tenants (Casey, 2008). The situation has been further exacerbated by the increasing multiplicity within the roles and organisational structures of social housing (Casey, 2008). Subsequently, the absence of 'a consistent and universally accepted view of the appropriate role and scope of housing management has hindered attempts to acquire a collective professional status of identity for the profession' (Casey, 2008: 762). The ambiguity around housing officers' professional identity may also intersect with the choices they make of whether to use discretionary power in negotiating difficulties at the frontline of service provision.

One of the most enduring and influential works on discretion at the frontline of service provision is Michael Lipsky's (1980) book *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*. Lipsky sought to understand and investigate the realities for frontline workers who were directly engaged in, what he deemed as, policy delivery. He notes that 'these realities influenced discretion, often in unexpected (and unseen) ways' (Brodin, 2012: 943). Lipsky's analysis provides a typology of working conditions

instrumental in generating discretion fundamental to street-level bureaucrats' professional practice. He argues the culmination of inadequate levels of resources, together with the regulations, laws, rules and organisation goals, that are often ambiguous and conflicting, create working conditions that are characterised by high caseloads in the context of uncertainty.

The milieu of uncertainty and scarcity is central to Lipsky's understandings of how the predicaments and conflicts faced by street-level bureaucrats influence their use of professional discretion (Evan & Harris, 2004). Lipsky's analysis is heavily focused on the structural rules and professional tasks as primary determinants of discretion but he 'largely discounted the existence of value-based discretion' (Lipsky, 2010: 71; Hoyle 2014: 198). To explore understandings around cultural differences at the interface of service provision value-based discretion becomes a critical component for the analysis of service providers' use of discretionary power. Therefore, it is essential to incorporate Taylor and Kelly's (2006; Hoyle 2014) conceptualisation into the analysis as it goes some way in addressing the absence of value-based discretion in Lipsky's understandings.

For Taylor and Kelly (2006) rule discretion, value discretion and task discretion are critical determinants in how discretionary power is used in street-level bureaucracies. They define rule discretion as 'bounded by legal, fiscal or organisation constraints'; value discretion as potentially being 'determined by notions of fairness or justice and ... [could] ... involve professional and organisational codes of conduct and ethics'; and task discretion as 'the ability to carry out prescribed tasks which involve working with clients' (Taylor & Kelly, 2006: 631). The inclusion of value discretion extends on the notion of frontline workers as 'situated agents' (Bevir, 2007), and points to their subjective and professional power to affect the lives of Indigenous service users and tenants. Whilst Lipsky's, Taylor and Kelly's writings and analyses occur in the American context, the importance of rule, task and value discretion at the frontline of service provision within the Australian context makes these understandings especially relevant for this study. The social housing milieu presents a challenging terrain for service providers working at the interface between their personal response to tenants and institutional demands and expectations, while operating in policy environments that may have limited differentiation and flexibility in the face of cultural difference. This is especially true for non-Indigenous housing officers delivering mainstream service provision to Indigenous tenant populations.

## 2.8 Conclusion

This chapter provides a sobering account of Indigenous people's homelessness profile in remote, regional and urban Australia on census night 2011. It reveals some of the key structural factors contributing to Indigenous people's homelessness, including the affordable housing crisis and Indigenous people's experience of discrimination and exclusion. These factors go some way in explaining Indigenous people's heavy reliance on the social housing sector to provide affordable housing options. The chapter explains how these structural and cultural factors intersect, and examines the problems arising from the conditional nature of mainstream policies. It draws attention to the increasingly punitive approach adopted by many housing service providers to address tenancy breaches and the vulnerability for Indigenous cultural practices and behaviours to conflict with these. Furthermore, the chapter explores the obfuscation surrounding housing officers' professional identity and how this may influence the choices they make of whether to action discretionary power in negotiating difficulties arising from the discord between Indigenous tenants' cultural needs and mainstream housing demands.

The key argument throughout this chapter is that service providers' understandings of cultural difference play a critical role in their interactions with Indigenous tenants. Largely missing from the literature reviewed is the role race plays in constructing notions of culture difference and how this shapes service delivery. The following chapter examines what *is* known about the role of race within social housing service provision and how existing theoretical frameworks may be adapted to provide a heuristic tool to investigate how race is understood by social housing service providers. The literatures presented so far demonstrate how mainstream housing policy, along with the structural and cultural factors influence Indigenous housing outcomes, providing the background for further exploration of the research questions at the centre of the thesis; how does race construct professional interactions with Indigenous service users and tenants?



## **3 Race and Indigenous housing**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides a brief overview of historic and contemporary understandings of race relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Building upon the literature of the previous chapter, the chapter examines the tenets of whiteness theory and identifies the applicability of the theory to offer a comprehensive critique of how race privileges and inequities are maintained and reproduced. Given the centrality of housing to human rights, health and wellbeing, analysing the racial micro-practice of service providers is essential in understandings the interactional space of service provision and the potential impact these interactions have on Indigenous housing outcomes (Burke, 2004; Habibis et al., 2007; Prout, 2008; Milligan et al., 2011). Indigenous discrimination and exclusion from mainstream social housing options can only be fully understood by examining the nexus between race privilege and oppression at the structural, institutional and micro-levels of intercultural interactions. By drawing attention to the mono-logical approach in empirical investigations of Indigenous people's experiences of inequality within housing service provision, the literature reviewed reinforces the applicability and critical importance of the inclusion of critical race theory within these investigations.

This chapter provides justification for employing whiteness theory as a race paradigm to examine race relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous service providers and clients. The chapter then goes on to highlight the theory's limitations in capturing the complexities of raced relations within the service provision terrain. It concludes by detailing how the amalgamation of whiteness theory with Bourdieu's social theory construct a conceptual framework to provide context around respondents' racialised subjectivities and sensibilities. This theoretical amalgamation provides an appropriate strategy to answer this study's research questions and the best fit to explore the intricacies of race and how it shapes understanding of cultural differences and service delivery to Indigenous tenants.

### **3.2 Understanding Australia's race relations**

Australia's documented white history invariably demonstrates the contested nature of race relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (see Reynolds, 2006; Hooper,

2009; Sutton, 2011; Clements, 2014; Moreton-Robinson, 2015). From the initial violence and massacres of colonisation, the brutal enforcement of white protectionist and segregation policies and the traumatic removal of Indigenous children from their families; up until the present day, Indigenous Australians and white Euro-Australians' race relations are marked with violence, resistance, power and oppression. Whilst significant events have changed the dynamics of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations (see Australian Aborigines League, 1932; Freedom Rides, 1965; Wave Hill Station 'Walk Off' 1966; Referendum, 1967; Aboriginal Tent Embassy, 1972; Racial Discrimination Act 1975; Aboriginal Land Rights, NT, 1976; ATSIC, 1990; Royal Deaths in Custody Report, 1991; Redfern Speech, 1992; Native Title Act 1993; Bring Them Home Report, 1997; Close the Gap Campaign, 2006; Northern Territory Emergency Response, 2007; Apology to the Stolen Generations, 2008; National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, 2010; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition Act, 2013), they denote how Indigenous peoples have continually resisted and struggled against the unyielding power of the white nation state.

A recent sociological study reveals how Indigenous Australians continue to maintain their resistance to the forces of white Euro-Australian values and expectations. Drawing on interviews with a cross section of Darwin's Indigenous residents and visitors, Habibis et al. (2016b) investigated how participants viewed and contested Euro- Australian politics, values, priorities and lifestyles. Most studies provide evidence on how Euro-Australians view race relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians however Habibis et al. reversed the racialised gaze and brought to the fore how the Indigenous peoples involved in their study perceived Australia's race relations. The findings revealed:

The narratives of the participants accumulate to produce a story about the ongoing rejection of Aboriginal people, values and culture by the dominant White settler population alongside their own rejection of the neo-liberal deal of individual advancement through economic pathways of employment and the accumulation of debt. They make visible an Indigenous truth organised around a radically different idea of the everyday and the meaningful. This co-exists with a quotidian and perpetual struggle to have these truths recognised in a geographic, cultural, economic, political and legal space ordered around a settler Australian social reality (Habibis et al., 2016b: 65).

While this is a small, non-generalisable study, it does raise some interesting points about the ongoing resistance by Indigenous peoples within the study, to the nation's dominant racial order and conceivably how these race tensions have their genesis in the unrelenting abuse of white power over Indigenous Australians' lives. Tellingly, there are few accounts of how white Euro-Australian power and privilege are disrupted to reconcile the tensions within Australia's race relations. Despite the reality that 'not all white people are signatories to the "racial contract" [of power and privilege], ... all benefit from it' (Mills 1997: 6). Within Mills' understanding of the 'racial contract' there is always, 'the differential privileging of the whites as a group, the exploitation of their [those who are not white] bodies, land and resources, and the denial of equal socioeconomic opportunities to them' (Mills, 1997: 11). It is this privileging that sets the context for many studies that investigate the race relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

For example, Habibis et al.'s (2016b: 58) study found race relations between Darwin's Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples are reflective of most Euro-Australians lack of understanding around the diversity of Indigenous people's lives. There appeared to be limited understandings around, 'Indigenous familial and community relationships or the complexity of their interactions with settler Australian culture'. Drawing on research by Holmes (2008) they revealed how Darwin's non-Indigenous people's perceptions of geographically mobile Indigenous peoples, demonstrated prevailing and inaccurate stereotypes and how these together with their inability to 'recognise the cultural nature of their own values, beliefs and attitudes, contributes to difficulties in improving Aboriginal health and well-being' (Habibis et al., 2016b: 58).

Other quantitative research tells a similar story. The Reconciliation Barometer (2008-2014), a national biennial survey, asks questions to gauge the differences and/or similarities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous respondents' understandings around Indigenous people's experience of racism, culture and disadvantage. In 2010, it found that for non-Indigenous respondents less than half believed that Indigenous people are mostly disadvantaged (Stopler & Hammond, 2010: 21). Such beliefs are maintained despite significant evidence to the contrary. As Habibis et al. (2016b: 58-59) assert:

A key reason for this disjuncture between settler Australian stereotypes and the lived reality of Aboriginal lives is that though the two groups may live in the same city they are socially, culturally, economically and spatially segregated from

them. The socioeconomic separations in health, well-being, employment and income are aligned with spatial ones so that Aboriginal peoples and settler Australians might live in the same places, but not in the same spaces. For most Australians, Aboriginal people are not their neighbours, their workmates, their service providers, or their friends.

Interestingly, there is just one question within the Reconciliation Barometer survey that endeavours to explore race relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, and notably there are no specific questions on respondents' perceptions of race privilege and power. The majority of the questions pertain to and measure understandings around marginalisation, discrimination and potential barriers for Indigenous peoples. While comparable data between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians understandings of racism and prejudice are crucial, additional questions exploring notions of race privilege, power and hegemony could provide valuable insight into how Australia's race relations are constructed, maintained and potentially contested and disrupted.

### 3.2.1 Whiteness theory

The absence of questions that explore the privileged position of whiteness in understanding race relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is a noted shortfall of many empirical studies. American sociologist, Teresa Guest (2006: 649) opines 'the sociology of race relations has failed to take into account both sides of the black/white binary paradigm when addressing race inequality'. Conversely, some scholars contend (see Hartmann et al., 2009) scholarship on race privilege and inequality is relatively well established, with non-white scholars (see DuBois, 1935; Fanon, [1967]1986; Roediger, 1998; Hooks, 1997), providing a detailed history of writing about white Americans and their problematic position on the racial hierarchy. Mainstream social scientists have documented American racial attitudes and opinions of whites for decades (see Sniderman & Piazza, 1993; Schuman et al., 1997); nonetheless, recent generations of whiteness studies emphasise the need to direct attention to questions of whether (or to what extent) white Americans understand their own racial identities and culture, and the privileges (Hartmann et al., 2009) that accompany them. Over the past few decades Australian scholars are also drawing on the principles of whiteness theory to understand the intersection between race inequality and social disadvantage. For Habibis et al. (2016b: 59), whiteness theory provides a tool for making sense of 'the disconnect between white-settler Australians and Indigenous realities'.

They highlight whiteness theory emphasises that whiteness ‘is not so much a biophysical phenomenon but rather a multi-layered social construct: an identity more than skin colour’ (Habibis et al., 2016b: 59).

Many anti-racism scholars (see DuBois, 1935; Said, 1978; McIntosh, 1988; Frankenberg, 1993; Dyer, 1997; Ivison et al., 2000; Perkins, 2004; Nicoll, 2004; Cowlinshaw, 2004; Foord, 2004; Moreton-Robinson, 2004; Garner, 2007; Clarke & Garner, 2010; Bonilla-Silva, 2015) locate white identity and white privileges at the centre of their empirical investigations of racism and race inequality. In doing so they disrupt the mono-logical interpretations of race inequality and promote a dialectic understanding that explores points of differentiation within social positioning and raced relations. As Phoenix (1996: 192) suggests, ‘[b]eing white signifies a social location, and as such, has a history and interconnectedness with other colours’. For Ruth Frankenberg (1993: 6) whiteness ‘assign[s] everyone a place in relations of racism’. In her 1993, seminal book *The Social Construction of white women, Whiteness race matters*, Frankenberg examines the social construction of whiteness determining it as ‘a location of structural advantage-of race privilege’ (Frankenberg, 1993: 1). Frankenberg refers to whiteness as a standpoint where white people look at society, at themselves and at others. She presents whiteness as instrumental to unfolding relations of domination, suggesting that it is historically, politically, socially and culturally produced. By naming whiteness and making it visible Frankenberg asserts this ‘displaces it from the unmarked, unnamed status that is itself an effect of its domination’ (Frankenberg, 1993: 1).

Frankenberg (1993: 11) analysis is underpinned by understandings that although race is a social construct, it is real in the sense ‘that it has real, though changing, effects in the world and real, tangible and complex impact on individuals’ sense of self, experiences and life chances’. Although race and racial differences are social constructs, this ‘does not minimise their social and political reality’, rather it reinforces the assertion, ‘that their reality is, precisely, social and political rather than inherent and static’ (Frankenberg, 1993: 11). The beauty of Frankenberg’s work is her identification of three distinct moments, paradigms or discourses in terms of shifts in thinking about race, ‘from “difference” to “similarity” and then “back” to difference, radically defined’ (1993: 14). She names the first paradigm of difference “essentialist racism” and defines it in, ‘hierarchical terms of essential, biological inequality’. The second paradigm she defines as “color evasiveness” and “power evasiveness” and suggest that this moment:

asserts we are all the same under the skin, that, culturally, we are converging, that we all have the same chances in ... society and ... the sting in the tail- any failure to achieve this is therefore the fault of people of color themselves (Frankenberg, 1993: 14).

Frankenberg's third paradigm is based on difference; however, it is constructed radically different from the first paradigm of "essentialist racism". In her third paradigm, "race cognizance", Frankenberg (1993) emphasises that, difference signals autonomy of values, culture, aesthetic standards and so on. Of paramount importance in this third paradigm, is that inequality refers to the social structure rather than ascribed characteristics.

The social construction of race, within the Australian context, has been evident since colonisation, where state and Commonwealth governments have imposed a series of initiatives on Indigenous people in attempts to control and direct their cultural expression and social behaviour in ways that conform more closely to white norms and lifestyles (Neutze, 2000; Read 2000; Hansen & Roche 2003; Morgan 2006; Prout 2008). The policy literature comprehensively detail how the state's white normative imperatives construct policies that constrain Indigenous people's lives and freedoms. The literature demonstrates the trajectory of the shift in policy focus from protection and segregation of Indigenous populations from the broader society, and then to notions of assimilation, and conversely ideas of self-determination and, in more recent times, a return to ideologies of guardianship of Indigenous people by the state (Prout, 2008).

Collectively, policies demonstrate the instrumental power of white ideologies and assumptions to enact spatial segregation of Indigenous populations and enforce state regulated governance and surveillance over their lives (Prout, 2008). For example, segregation policies supported spatial isolation of Indigenous peoples through relocating peoples to reserves or institutions, which largely excluded them from mainstream housing options and the broader society (Prout, 2008). Throughout these policy shifts, the one unyielding factor is the role of white hegemony and power in determining how Indigenous peoples were meant to live in remote, regional and urban Australian society. Whiteness theory is particularly useful for understanding these events as well as examining the intersection between race, constructions of cultural difference and the potential implications these have for service delivery to Indigenous people. Nonetheless, critics point to the

limitations of the theory to provide a detailed understanding of the race relations between whites and non-whites.

### 3.2.2 Critiques of whiteness theory

Critics of whiteness, or critical race theory more generally, (see Faber & Sherry, 1997; Hayes & Hartlep, 2013) problematise the reductionist nature of the black/white binary as homogenising all whites as privileged and powerful and all blacks as marginalised and oppressed. Some detractors are keen to portray whiteness theory, ‘as peddling a view of White people -all White people- as universally and irredeemably racist’ (Gillborn, 2015: 277). Largely, criticisms appear to be centred around key assumptions that race is prioritised over other axes of inequality, such as class, gender, sexualities, disabilities and the like within empirical investigations of inequalities and social marginalisation. Despite these claims a significant body of research, especially in the field of education, specifically explore the intersectionality of race and other axis of differentiation (Gillborn, 1995; 2008; 2010; 2015; Delgado, 1995; Harry & Klinger, 2006). Gillborn, a Professor of critical race studies, opines:

Critical race theorists tend to start with race/racism. This does not blind ... them to other forms of exclusion. In the words of Zeus Leonardo (2005: xi), critical race scholars “privilege the concept of race as the point of departure for critique, not the end of it” ... race-conscious scholarship is frequently challenged to defend itself in ways that other radical perspectives are not: When speaking about “race” in education, many ... have been faced with the question “What about class/gender/sexuality/disability/faith?” whereas rarely are speakers on these topics ever asked, “What about ‘race?’” (Gillborn, 2015: 284).

This study recognises whiteness theory as a useful tool to expose race privilege and its effect on the social stratification of Indigenous peoples. However, the contention is the theory neglects, in the main, to provide context around how and why race privileges are maintained and reproduced, other than suggesting the race privileges are not recognised and/or they suit the beneficiaries. Throughout the body of literature reviewed, the power and privileging of whiteness has serious implications for everyday lives and Indigenous identity (Rowse, 2009), as it increases race tensions, reduces non-Indigenous empathy (Holmes, 2008), reinforces informal racial segregation and contributes to prejudice and violence.

Many housing researchers recognise that ‘Indigenous Australians’ ... housing conditions, experiences and opportunities can vary markedly from ‘mainstream’ understandings of housing wellbeing and are heavily influenced by cultural norms’ (Stone et al., 2013: 18). This study aligns with these understandings and contends that white hegemonic cultural norms also heavily influence Indigenous Australians experiences of the social housing system and housing officers’ delivery of housing services.

To examine the role race plays in shaping Indigenous people’s experience of homelessness and housing insecurity it was critical to investigate how service providers construct understandings of cultural difference through their personal and professional biographies. Whiteness theory provides the tool to expose how race privilege maintains race disadvantage however, it was necessary to incorporate an additional theoretical paradigm, specifically Pierre Bourdieu’s (1972) Theory of Practice (habitus + capital + fields= practice) to provide context around service providers’ race subjectivities and the nexus between these and their professional practice and frontline interactions. The following section provides an overview of Bourdieu’s relational theory. A brief synopsis of each categorical component of Bourdieu’s theory is discussed to demonstrate its relevance and theoretical applicability to address the research questions guiding the study.

### 3.3 Bourdieu’s Theory of Practice

The benefit of Bourdieu’s theory is that it transcends the prominent objective (structure) - subjective (agency) antinomy of much sociological scholarship. It reconciles the dualism(s) ‘of structure vs. agency, structuralism vs. constructivism, determinism vs. freedom or macro vs. micro’ (Bourdieu, 1972; Walther, 2014: 7). Bourdieu’s Theory of Practice (1972) contends that ‘one’s practice is intimately tied to one’s habitus, which is tied to one’s relative capital, which is tied to the fields in which one operates. These interlocking themes constitute his relational framework [(habitus) (capital)] +fields = practice’ (McKnight & Chandler, 2009: 101), where all the elements intersect with each other.

Each component of Bourdieu’s theory is instrumental in providing understanding around how individual service providers with diverse subjectivities and sensibilities operate within and negotiate the demands of the social housing sector. Personal and professional demands are negotiated by the various amounts of capital available to them, with these potentially competing factors merging together to shape frontline interactions with service users and



tenants. The next section provides a brief definition of the social fields as arenas of practice and how this relates to the field of social housing.

### 3.3.1.1 Bourdieu's social fields

The daily lives of service providers are shaped by numerous interactions comprising discussions, negotiations and conflicts. In order to understand these interactions, it is critical to explore the circumstances and milieu where they are produced. Interactions need to be considered in their respective social spaces, that are divided into distinct social fields, serving as arenas of practice (Walther, 2014). Bourdieu understood the social world as divided up into various distinct arenas or 'fields' of practice including arenas such as art, education, law, labour markets, politics and religion, and the like; each with their own unique set of rules, knowledges, and forms of capital. By adopting Bourdieu's conceptualisation, social housing fields are defined as a microcosm in which service providers and organisations are integrated and interact with each other in accordance with the rules specific to the field. Extending upon Bourdieu's definition, Walter (2010) suggests that fields are socially constructed locations where societal knowledge, status, goods and services are produced and circulated. Relentless competition for acquisition of these good are played out within these social realms.

While fields often overlap, Bourdieu views each field as being relatively autonomous from the others. Each field has its own set of positions and practices, as well as its struggles for position, as people mobilise their capital to stake claims within a social domain. Seen through Bourdieu's eyes a field is a 'locus of struggles' (Bourdieu, 1975:19) that represents a network of positions (Walther, 2014). Struggles between individuals are predominantly about relative positions within the field, where individuals are trying to maximise capital, making conformity with the rules of the field a necessity (Iellatchitch et al., 2003). In this study fields were determined as places of power relations where service providers' professional practices, individually and collectively, are not arbitrary. As Walther (2014) contends once it has been understood that all interactions are in a specific social field, it then becomes crucial to examine how positions on the respective fields are gained (Walther, 2014). Starting from the premise that a social field represents the arena where certain rules apply (Bourdieu, 1972), service providers need to be equipped with a specific quantity and structure of resources, that they can then utilise to obtain the right to enter the field. Each distinct field values specific types of resources (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) which Bourdieu refers to as capital.

### 3.3.1.2 Bourdieu's capital

Bourdieu distinguishes between four types of capital, namely cultural, economic, social and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986), which individuals use to enter and move on social fields (Walther, 2014). Although Bourdieu's capitals are distinct, in reality they are closely linked. He draws on the notion of capital to explain, in part, the foundation of one's social life and how this dictates their position within the social order. Bourdieu, like Marx, argued the more capital the individual has the more powerful position they occupy in social life; however, Bourdieu extended Marx's notion of capital beyond the economic parameters and into the more symbolic realm of culture (Bennett & Silva, 2006).

Cultural capital refers to the accumulation of cultural knowledges, skills, tastes, abilities, posture, clothing, mannerisms, material belongings, credentials, that one acquires through being part of a particular social class (Yosso, 2006). Cultural capital is deemed to be transferred by family and education and may be institutionalised in the forms of education qualification. Walther (2014: 10) contends that 'cultural capital is the primary cause for status and relative positions within a social field'. Bourdieu warns that cultural capital is a major source of social inequality as specific forms of cultural capital are valued over others, and can help or hinder one's social mobility just as much as income or wealth. US professor Tara Yosso (2006:76) extends upon Bourdieu's assertion by suggesting:

while Bourdieu's work sought to provide a structural critique of social and cultural reproduction, his theory of cultural capital has been used to assert that some communities are culturally wealthy while others are culturally poor. This interpretation of Bourdieu exposes white, middle-class culture as the standard and therefore all other forms of expression of 'culture' are judged in comparison to this 'norm'.

A criticism often levelled at Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital and its varying forms: social capital (i.e. social networks, connection); economic capital (i.e. money and other material possessions); and symbolic capital (i.e. honour, prestige, status), is that little attention is paid to the intersection of race and ethnicity within its analysis (Yosso, 2006). Consequently, many race scholars (see Hage, 1998; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008; Walter et al., 2011) have taken up this empirical challenge by incorporating the concept of 'race capital' within their work, to delineate how:

Societally produced and reproduced race is still a potent explanatory of why one group, distinguished by skin colour, culture, or place of origin, differ in life chances to others. Race as a social relation of power is underpinned by a society's system, usually entrenched, of racial stratification ... race capital, like other capitals, is distributed unequally prefigured as a sphere of relational societal resource: both a predictor and determinant of our social positioning (Walter, 2010: 47).

Understanding race capital is especially important to the investigation of this study as race plays a crucial role in understandings of cultural difference, and the subsequent influence on professional practice and interactions which may impact housing options and outcomes for Indigenous tenants.

### 3.3.1.3 Race Capital

Whilst Bourdieu (1979) put forward the idea that we live our lives within a three-dimensional social space defined by our cultural, social and economic capital, Australian sociology Professor Maggie Walter (2010) suggests we occupy a four-dimensional social space. In this four-dimensional social space, individuals' life trajectories are shaped by intertwined cultural, economic, racial and social capital interactions. Seen through Walter's eyes, this four-way interweaving recognises the raced nature of social and cultural capital, with her asserting:

Unlike class there is a fixivity to race; an individual's habitus is permeated with racially aligned levels of social and cultural capital, irrespective of its overall operation. Somewhat paradoxically, individual position on the racial hierarchy simultaneously and independently of social, cultural and economic capital, affects social reproduction and access to social power (Walter 2010: 47).

These understandings broaden the ability of Bourdieu's theory to explore social inequality at the interface of social housing service provision and reinforces the place of race as a superordinate dimension of the social space. The linking and association between capitals is a central component to Bourdieu's argument 'that individuals use the value inherent in the capitals of their habitus to competitively garner resources circulating in [the social] fields' (Walter 2010: 47).

### 3.3.1.4 Bourdieu's theory of habitus

The habitus is a central component in Bourdieu's Theory of Practice. Habitus is understood here as the physical embodiment of one's deeply ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions accumulated through life experiences. These values and dispositions that are gained from an individual's cultural history generally stay with them across contexts and because of this, the ways in which they act and react in certain situations is largely determined, because of who and where the person fits within the social universe (Webb et al., 2002). However, the habitus is durable but evolving and is continually adjusted to the current context and reinforced by further experiences (Mayrhofer et al., 2007). Bourdieu contends an individual's worldview is not passively received, rather it is constructed by the individual or collective habitus of the culture of which he or she is a part of (McKnight & Chandler, 2009).

For Bourdieu, the habitus is acquired during primary and secondary socialisation, with primary socialisation garnered from the family during childhood. The resulting primary habitus (*habitus primaire*) is rather stable, with children internalising into their habitus their parents' modes of thinking, behaving and feeling that are linked to their parents' social position in the social space (Walther, 2014). Bourdieu (1977) also delineates this as class habitus (*habitus de classe*) that reflects the varying positions people occupy in society, leading to different lifestyles tastes and interests among social classes (Bourdieu, 1984). The secondary habitus (*habitus secondaire*) is built on the primary habitus and is the culmination of education through school, university and other life experiences. As Walther (2014: 13) explains:

The primary habitus as “embodied history, internalized as second nature and so forgotten as history” (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 56) never loses its impact and always influences the development of the secondary habitus. In this respect, the primary and secondary habitus can also be summarized into one single habitus that is constantly reinforced and modified by life experiences giving it a dynamic quality (Chudzikowski & Mayrhofer, 2011). As the product of our past and present experiences, the habitus seems to be a never-ending restructuring internal structure (Bonnewitz, 2005). However, this does not imply that our system of dispositions changes at any new life event. Indeed, Bourdieu believes the habitus to be rather inertial (Chudzikowski & Mayrhofer, 2011) or “durable, but not eternal” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992 p. 133).

Bourdieu suggests that the habitus operates at the level of the unconscious and is essentially arbitrary in nature, nonetheless the power of habitus in society and its institutions, is that the habitus defines what is natural or commonsense, [defining or naturalising] itself and the cultural rules, agendas and values that make it possible (Swartz, 1997). For Bourdieu, all meaning is socially constructed, therefore the habitus only exists in relation to other interactions, other behaviours and the environment, in other words the habitus ‘does not stand alone with meaning in the social universe’ (McKnight & Chandler, 2009: 83). Bourdieu (1972) stresses the dialectic relationship between structure and agency that manifests in the habitus, within his conceptualisation of habitus as ‘structured structures (structures structurées) that are predisposed to act as structuring structures (structures structurantes)’ (Walther, 2014: 14). Conceivably, the habitus is constructed by social structures, more so that of one’s social class and the internalising of the rules of the game on the field. Paradoxically, the habitus also structures practices and reproduces social fields (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000).

The interplay between habitus and field can be understood as dialectical relationship between objective structures and subjective dispositions within which objective structures are legitimated and reproduced (Bourdieu, 1977). This makes the habitus both ‘opus operatum’ and ‘modus operandi’ (Bourdieu 1977: 36) with it being ‘both the result of practice and modes of practices’ (Walther, 2014: 14). As Crossley (2001: 101) suggests, ‘Involvement in a field shapes the habitus, which in turn shapes the perceptions and actions leading to the reinforcement of the rules of the field.’ Bourdieu’s Theory of Practice (1972) explores how the interplay between field, capital and habitus leads to practice, where an individual’s unconscious behaviour is congruent with their interests and aims to achieve their objectives by investing and fighting for capital. Bourdieu understands practice as:

the result of social structures on a particular field (structure; macro) where certain rules apply and also of one’s habitus (agency; micro), i.e. the embodied history that is manifested in our system of thinking, feeling, perceiving and behaving. The habitus assures the collective belief in the rules of the social game (illusio) and that actors act in accordance with their position on the field (doxa), which depends on their relative amount and structure of economic, cultural (and social) capital (Walther, 2014: 15).

The amalgamation of both whiteness theory and Bourdieu's theory provides a robust theoretical framework to explore respondents' subjective racialised understanding within the broader context of the social housing field. It allows for a detailed exploration of how race shapes subjectivities, professional practice and interactions with Indigenous service users and social housing tenants. Conceivably all of these factor impact Indigenous people's experience of service provision and housing outcomes.

### 3.4 Conclusion

This chapter presents the significance of race privilege in shaping interactions at the interface of housing service delivery. Building on the literature from the previous chapter, the chapter identifies the applicability of whiteness theory for offering a comprehensive critique of how race privilege and inequities are maintained and reproduced within the interactional space of social housing service provision. It argued that Indigenous discrimination and exclusion from social housing options can only be fully understood by examining the nexus between race privilege and oppression at the structural, institutional and micro-levels of intercultural interactions. By drawing attention to the mono-logical approach in empirical investigation of Indigenous people's experiences of inequality within housing service provision, the literature reviewed reinforces the applicability and critical importance of the inclusion of critical race theory within these investigations.

In addition, this chapter has set up the rationale for merging Bourdieu's Theory of Practice (1972) with key principles of whiteness theory. It concludes by explaining how the amalgamation of whiteness theory with Bourdieu's social theory is the best theoretical framework to address the study's research questions. The next chapter demonstrates how the merging of these theoretical perspectives culminated in my development of a heuristic tool, *The Racial Labyrinth of Subjectivities and Professional Practice*, and explains how this was applied to the research data.

## 4 Methodology and Method

### 4.1 Introduction

The research for this thesis delved into the subjective and professional worlds of housing service providers to illuminate how understanding of cultural difference influence Indigenous service users and tenants' experience of race within the interactional space of social housing service provision. To make this world visible deep consideration was given to the methodology and the methods chosen to carry out this research, with a qualitative, explanatory research method deemed the best method to address the concerns of the study. This approach allowed for investigations into *why* race privilege and disadvantage occur and the forces and influences that drive their occurrence (Ritchie, 2003) at the frontline of service provision. Qualitative research provides this study with the unique tool for investigating the race assumptions that shape respondents' decisions, attitudes and behaviours toward Indigenous homeless individuals and tenant populations.

This chapter outlines the methodological approach and the development and implementation of methods used to carry out the research. After, broadly locating the study within an interpretive, social constructionism paradigm, it discusses the theoretical and conceptual framework and how these were applied to research data. It defines key concepts and provides an overview of the significant, practical and methodological rationale for using in-depth, semi-structured interviews as an empirical research strategy. It discusses the processes used to recruit participants, and the implications of conducting both face-to-face (FTF) and telephone interviews. The chapter concludes with a discussion of who the participants were, and reflects on some of the ethical issues of a white researcher researching how Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants' values and perceptions of Indigenous cultural norms and practices shape their understandings of cultural difference and impact race relations at the frontline of service delivery.

### 4.2 Methodology

A significant amount of literature exploring Indigenous people's experience of race inequality relies on quantitative approaches to capture a snapshot of Indigenous disadvantage. Equally, representations of Indigenous homelessness and housing tenure types are easily found through national statistical agencies, including the ABS and AIHW. While they

provide critical information that objectively measures, variables and patterns, such as homelessness and race inequity, the *meanings* attributed to these experiences remain largely unexplored through quantitative forms of inquiry. Quantitative research often ignores the significance and value of personal perspectives and the importance of these to provide understandings of the nuanced ways in which individuals construct and make meaning of their everyday lives (Schutz, 1962; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Richie, 2003).

In contrast to the prevalence of national, large scale studies (see Reconciliation Barometer 2009-2014; Challenging Racism: The Anti-Racist Project 2011) and chronological statistical data (see ABS; AIHW), this research was qualitative and explorative in nature. Rather than making claims about the broader population, my research is consistent with the formal qualitative approaches, pointing to the importance of providing deep and layered understanding of a small and exclusive area of study (Layder, 1993). By focusing on ‘people’ rather than ‘statistics’; ‘meaning-making’ and ‘interpretation’ rather than ‘quantifying’ and ‘measurement’; and ‘subjective’ and the ‘lived’ as opposed to the ‘abstracted’ and the ‘general’ (Franzosi, 1998: 526-527), this qualitative approach was consistent with the objectives of the research.

This study was broadly located within an ‘interpretive’, social constructionist framework. A central tenet of the social constructivism paradigm underpinning this research is that ‘reality is constructed by people through interaction’ and it is through ‘the process of interaction that people define themselves and the world they inhabit’ (Clapham, 2012: 176). Increasingly, the merit of this framework within housing studies has been advanced by many scholars (see Jacobs & Manzi, 2000a; Clapham et al., 2000; Jacobs & Manzi, 2000b; Jacobs et al., 2004; Fopp, 2008). The research argues the interpretive paradigm permits the exploration of how housing service providers’ perceptions and delivery of services are informed by the production and reproduction of diverse understandings and differing versions of reality, noting that these experiential understandings are invariably linked to institutional and structural forces (Clapham et al., 2000).

By providing context around respondents’ professional experiences the notions of service providers as ‘passive ciphers of structural forces or mere prisoners of their own background and upbringing’ was disrupted (Clapham et al., 2000: 74). This position highlights the milieu in which housing officers, ‘actively [construct] ... their roles on a day-to-day basis and

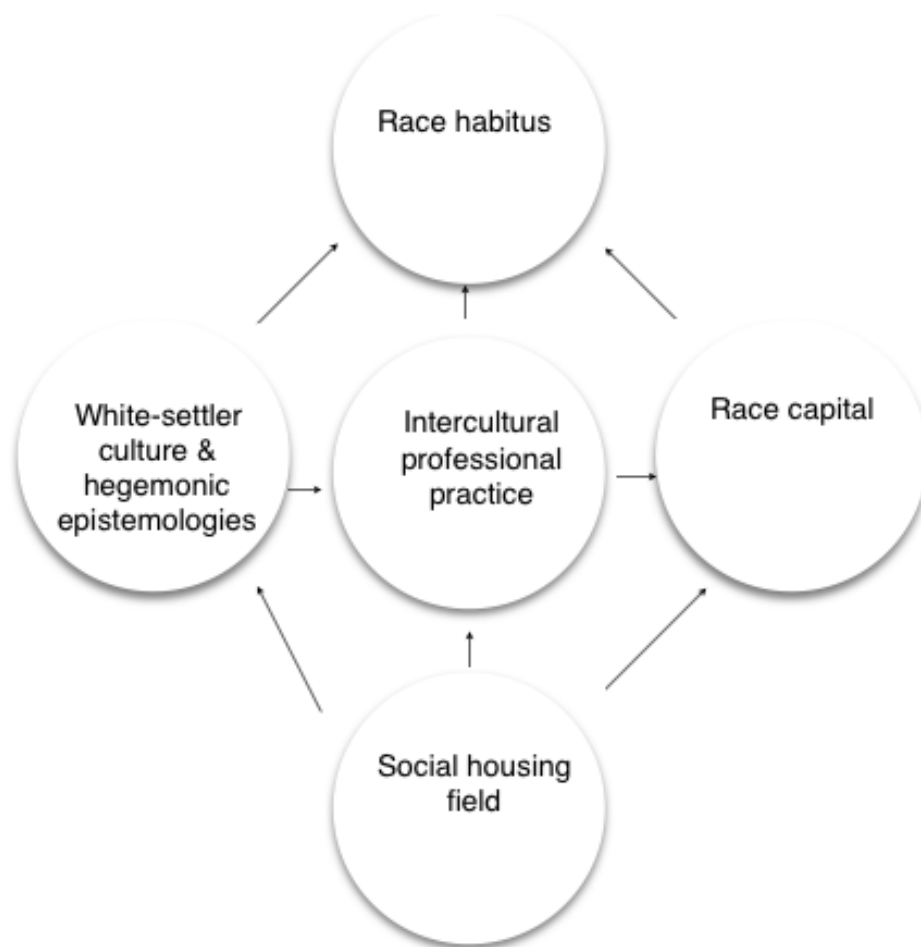


[react] ... to the conflicting and changing pressures and expectations of them from their tenants ... their own organizations and colleagues' (Clapham et al., 2000: 74). Furthermore, by exploring respondents' understandings of their professional practice, and the meanings and values they attribute to these, an interpretivist approach enabled detailed 'understanding of research participants' views and actions in the context of their lives overall' (Snape & Spencer, 2003:7).

Critics of social constructionism (e.g. Greenwood, 1992; Fisher, 1995; Mancuso, 1996; Michael, 1997; Danziger, 1997; Markova, 2000) suggest it is through the micro focus on meaning-making and privileging of agency, that the influences of macro structures are ignored. This study aligns with Bourdieu's (1990: 39) claim that 'the interaction [and meaning-making] itself owes its form to the objective structures that has produced the dispositions of the interacting agents'. By adopting this approach, the dichotomous positioning of agency and structure are contested, with the suggestion that one does not operate in isolation from the other and thereby avoiding the reduction of human meaning-making to the binary dialectic of, 'external constraints or subjective whims' (Swartz, 2002: 616). It allowed for nuanced explorations of multiple constructed realities, with the meanings and explanations attributed to race and cultural differences being shared through the co-constructed investigation by the researcher and participants.

### 4.3 Theoretical framework and conceptual model

Committed to the task of understanding and contextualising racialised subjectivities, the research combined aspects from two theoretical paradigms; Critical Race Theory (CRT) specifically whiteness theory, and Bourdieu's social theory '[(habitus) (capital)] +field = practice' (Bourdieu, 1984: 101). The amalgamation of these theories culminated in my development of *The Racial Labyrinth of Subjectivities and Professional Practice*. The labyrinth illustrates that each formulaic component of Bourdieu's theory is inextricably racialised. It provided me with an analytical tool to showcase the intra-relational, multi-layered constructions of housing providers' subjective and professional understanding of cultural difference and explores how these influence professional interactions with Indigenous service users and tenants. The diagram on the following page illustrates the dimensions of the labyrinth and I then go on to describe each element.



**Figure 4-1: The racial labyrinth of subjectivities and professional practice**

#### 4.3.1 Defining the Labyrinth

The first three dimensions of the labyrinth-*white-settler culture and hegemonic epistemologies*, *race habitus* and *race capital* helped to establish and interpret participants' epistemological, axiological and ontological standpoints, whilst the other two dimensions-*social housing field* and *intercultural professional interactions* offered insights into how the inter-relational aspects of these standpoints shaped and influenced the organisational and interactional space of service provision. The following section briefly defines each component of the labyrinth to showcase the importance of each dimension, separately and collectively.

##### 4.3.1.1 White-settler culture and hegemonic epistemologies

An intrinsic component of the labyrinth is the concept of white-settler culture and hegemonic epistemologies. As discussed earlier in this thesis, I contend the colonised national Australian identity is constructed through white European ideologies, theories and understandings, and

remains deeply embedded in a history of Imperialism and colonisation (Connell, 2007). White-settler culture and hegemonic epistemologies are the dominant racialised narrative constructed through mono-logical systems of knowledge production. These knowledges privilege and legitimate white-settler cultural norms and values and marginalise Aboriginal knowledge systems and cultural mores (Moreton-Robinson, 2004). This racialised monopoly of knowledge production is created and maintained through the dominant racial hierarchy constructing the idea of Australia as a homogenised white nation (Elder et al., 2004; Elder, 2007). Moreover, this re/produces macro structures that support or oppose individuals' subjectivities and sensibilities, shaping how individuals understand and experience their values, practices, preferences and world views that make sense to them, in other words, their habitus (Walter et al., 2011). Providing their habitus is congruent with, and supported by, structural, institutional and societal mechanism, their cultural mores, behaviours and practices are deemed normative and therefore legitimated within the dominant society. I have applied this perspective in my research, meaning I have considered that respondents' epistemological standpoint, in other words how their knowledges were constructed, were informed and legitimated or conversely, contested and opposed by white-settler culture and hegemonic knowledge production.

#### 4.3.1.2 Racial habitus

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus was employed and adapted in the labyrinth to bring to light the inter-relational, embedded nature of race within habitus formation. Bourdieu's application of habitus is primarily centred on individual dispositions, cultural tastes and their alliance with class; however, the concern of this study was to understand how race as a social construct permeates the inculcation of dispositions that inform an individual's habitus; such as tastes, perceptions and their cognitive framework. Central to this study's analysis was the idea that participants' axiological standpoint, this being their deeply held values and worldview are racialised, which positions them within a racial social system that also produces a habitus which is unique to different racial groups (Walter, 2010).

Many race theorists have defined 'racial habitus' as, 'a matrix of tastes, perceptions and cognitive frameworks that are often unconscious in the racial practices of actors ... [reproducing] ... the very racial distinctions and inequalities that produce them' (Horvat & Antonia, 1999; Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Emerson & Woo, 2006; Bonilla-Silva et al., 2006; Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2007; Bourgois & Schonberg, 2007; Sallaz, 2010, cited in Perry,

2012: 90). These understandings determine the habitus as performative within practice. That said, it is noted that action does not emanate from habitus alone; in part, it draws on forms and amounts of capital available, to enact practice. Seen through Bourdieu's eyes (1990: 64):

A given agent's practical relation to the future, which governs his present, is defined in the relationship between, on the one hand, his habitus, with its temporal structures and dispositions towards the future, constituted in the course of a particular relationship to a particular universe of probabilities, and on the other hand a certain state of chances objectively offered to him by the social world.

Bourdieu (1984) argues that we live our lives within three-dimensional social space defined by our social, cultural and economic capital positioning.

Bourdieu's conceptual innovation is his expansion of "capital" as a resource for acquiring social position and power beyond standard economic understandings'. Social and cultural capital he argues, can, and are, similarly utilised to create and reproduce interpersonal power relations. Bourdieu (1998: 31) uses the notion of social space to demonstrate, the principle of a *relational* (italics in the original) understanding of the social world (Bourdieu 1998: 31). Our overall social space position, our capital relationalities, shapes our life chances and while we act as individuals we share this position with those with similar capital levels (Walter, 2010: 46).

However, Walter (2010) contends that we live in a four-not three- dimensional space, with the social construct of race also demarcating structural and social position. She suggests:

race also delineates structural and structuring position, theoretically independent of cultural, economic and social dimensions' (Walter, 2010:47). Race as a social relation of power is underpinned by a society's system, usually entrenched, of racial stratification. Population differentiation into hierarchically superposed racial groups (Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva 2008:15) establishes the capital power of a particular race position. Thus race capital, like other capitals, is distributed unequally prefigured as a sphere of relational societal resource: both a predictor and determinant of our social positioning (Walter, 2010:47).

This study applied Walter's premise that 'an individual's habitus is permeated with racially aligned levels of social and cultural capital', however their position on 'the racial hierarchy *simultaneously* and *independently* of social, cultural and economic capital, affects social production and access to social power' (Walter, 2010: 47 original emphasis).

#### 4.3.1.3 Race capital

To operationalise the concept of race capital within the parameters of this research, it was defined as an intrinsic racialised resource that is constituted through identification with, and/or membership within communities, together with implicit and/or explicit knowledge of culture practices and mores. Race capital demarcates participants' ontological standpoint, this being their positioning within the dominant racialised hierarchy, and distinguishes how understandings of its perceived benefits or detriments can influence organisational and intercultural practice. As Walter (2010:47) suggests:

A society's race capital continuum is a product of its racial profile and configurations of race relationships. These systems are not binary, rather marked by patterned gradations in their bestowal of racial capital, varying by place, time and history. The unique racial stratification systems of coloniser nations such as Australia reinforce the place of race as a superordinate dimension of social space. Australia's racial hierarchy and pattern of race capital conference emerge from distinct race infused histories and interaction practices. These reflected, and reflect, colonisation and its processes of possession/dispossession, privilege/disadvantage and entitlement/marginalisation. Those currently and historically at the top, Anglo-Australians, vary widely in their allotted social, cultural and economic capital, but share race capital position. Positionings across the lower gradations, mostly migrants from non- English speaking countries, change over time. For example, older groups from Southern Europe and Asia have experienced a rise in race capital as newer groups, such as peoples from Africa and the Middle East, take up positions further down the race status ladder. The Indigenous place at the bottom remains, as does the shared level of low and embodied race capital.

The rationale for this category was for it to provide insight into how housing providers' race capital influenced their positioning and experiences within the social housing field and at the interface of their intercultural professional practice.

#### 4.3.1.4 Social Housing field

The social housing field is understood as a professional terrain whereby an assemblage of racialised perceptions, values and etiquette establish institutional standards, privileging and legitimating Euro-Australian values and mores. Professional practice within social housing service provision is constructed and scrutinised through the prism of white rationalities, mores and ideologies, creating a potentially conflictual milieu for service providers from Indigenous and minority cultural backgrounds. Horvst and Antonio (1999 cited in Perry, 2012: 93) suggest that many housing workers, 'make tremendous social and cultural sacrifices in exchange for the organizational benefits they seek'. The research was concerned with how respondents negotiate their position within the field and navigate its legislative regulations and practice requirements, whilst exploring the influence these factors have on their professional interactions.

#### 4.3.1.5 Intercultural professional interactions

The research was undertaken based on an understanding that all the racialised relational elements of the labyrinth would combine and manifest within the micro-relational components of participants' intercultural professional interactions. Analysis of the respondents' narratives and the discourses they employed to describe and understand intercultural professional practice help illuminate the multifarious racialised understandings of cultural differences and implications for professional interactions. Hence, the micro-analysis permitted by the labyrinth enabled a glimpse into how service providers' racialised subjectivities informed and constructed their practice, and the manner in which they interacted and delivered services to Indigenous homeless individuals and tenant populations.

### 4.4 Key concepts- race and culture

By using the term 'race', the study highlighted the idea of socially constructed differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, as 'race is above all a marker of difference, an axis of differentiation' (Frankenberg, 1993: 138). Historically, this axis of differentiation has been based on genetics and visible, physical characteristics of individuals and/or members of a population; however, for the purpose of the study it was primarily ascribed to individuals and/or groups belonging to, and identifying with particular cultural practices, values, beliefs and behaviours within their everyday lives. Race was therefore defined as a social and cultural construct that is distinguished by cultural norms and practices and is demarcated through economic, social and political positioning within Australian

society. By defining race within the cultural, economic and socio-political sphere, it allowed for the investigation of potential hegemonic cultural privilege and social exclusion of racial minorities at the individual, institutional and structural levels.

The study utilised conventional definitions of culture that point to the characteristics and knowledge of groups of people symbolically defined by language, religion, mores, social behaviours, custom and convention (Abercrombie et al., 1994). Therefore, culture was understood as ubiquitous, subtle and embodied in symbols and artefacts.

## 4.5 Methods

The qualitative nature of this research meant the study aimed to provide nuanced explanations of how housing service providers, regulated by policy and organisational requirements, understand their racialised identities and its influence on their practice and experience with Indigenous service users and tenants. Throughout the thesis, I included as much biographical information that respondents were willing to share with me. Some respondents demonstrated considerable insight into the interplay between their cultural background and interactions with Indigenous tenants. The purpose was not to generalise these findings to the broader population, rather the study intended to provide detailed and rich understandings of every day accounts of professional intercultural practices at the interface of social housing provisions. In doing so, it also brought to light the potential implications for Indigenous tenancy outcomes.

### 4.5.1 Location and selection criteria

The study took place across regional and urban Queensland. Through an introduction, organised by my supervisor, Associate Professor Daphne Habibis, initial contact was made with the Chairperson of a metropolitan community housing organisation (CHO) in Brisbane. After the Chairperson sought consent from the CEO, willing respondents agreeing to participate in the study were identified. The selection criteria required participants were aged 18 years and over, employed as a housing service provider in the social housing sector in Queensland and had past or current professional experiences with Indigenous tenants. There were no exclusion criteria for this study, male and female respondents from any cultural background, working in various types of social housing organisations were encouraged to participate.

Queensland proved to be a suitable and significant location to conduct this research primarily due to the following reasons. First, I reside in Tasmania which has a relatively small Indigenous population in comparison to Queensland, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples accounting for 3.6 per cent of the Queensland population. As of June 30, 2011, Queensland has the second largest Indigenous population in Australia (see Table 4-1).

**Table 4-1: Estimated resident population of Indigenous peoples**

State	(n)
NSW	208,476
Qld	188,954
Vic	47,333
Tas	24,165
WA	88,270
NT	68,850
ACT	6,160

Source: ABS:2011

Census data (2011) suggests approximately 41,904 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples reside in Greater Brisbane. Seventy-three per cent (113,188) of Aboriginal people live in the rest of the state (ABS, 2011), which supported the study's rationale for conducting research across regional locations and metropolitan areas.

#### 4.5.2 Recruitment strategies

A non-probability sample was used for selecting the population for this study. The sample was deliberately selected with the aim to reflect particular features within the sampled population of social housing service providers. Purposive sampling was adopted to recruit housing officers working with Indigenous service users and tenants. Based on the aims of the research, this strategy allowed for targeted sampling of a specific section of a population (Tranter, 2009), as the selection of participants who were unique and could serve as rich sources of data (Neuman, 2011). Snowball sampling was also employed, as participants who agreed to participate in the study were asked to recommend other individuals who met the criteria to join the research. Both sampling strategies served to complement the recruitment process by increasing participation rates (Hennik et al., 2011). The process of identifying suitable housing organisations and potential participants in Queensland was conducted in two



phases. Phase one began with email contact with the Chairperson of a Brisbane Community Housing organisation. The initial email outlined the rationale and aims of the study and detailed ethical considerations, which included the Human Research Ethic Application. The Chairperson approached the CEO, resulting in the CEO agreeing to allow staff participation in the project. A letter of support required by the Ethics Committee was sent by the Chairperson after the CEO consented to conduct the research within the organisation.

Subsequent email contact provided the CEO with information about the study, my contact details along with an invitation for housing service providers to participate. Details of what participation involvement would encompass were outlined in a Participant Information (see Appendix Two) and a Participant Consent Form (see Appendix Three) was emailed to, and distributed by, the CEO to housing workers. Additionally, the Chairperson provided contact details of a regional CEO of an Indigenous community housing organisation (ICHO). Contact was established, the rationale and aims of the study along with a Participant Information Sheet and Participant Consent Form were provided via email and distributed to staff. This culminated in mutually-agreed upon dates being organised for when and where the interviews would take place.

Phase two of the recruitment was underpinned by the knowledge that it was especially important that the groundwork for the recruitment process was done while I was in Tasmania, considering the time and fiscal restraints of the PhD project. A Google internet search resulted in a list of social housing organisations, their location and their contact details. The only criterion required was that organisations engaged with Indigenous clients. The telephone numbers proved to be crucial in recruiting participants, as the recruitment uptake within the two housing organisations that initially consented to participate in the study prior to fieldwork beginning in Queensland, was small. One reason for low participation rate within the regional ICHO was that many consenting participants were unavailable to take part in an interview as they were away attending to 'sorry business'. Due to the indeterminate time frame these cultural obligations were likely to take, it became apparent that the project was facing a recruitment dilemma.

Telephone calls were made to all the numbers on the contact list with a total of nine housing organisations agreeing to participate in the study. These organisations were scattered between a 1,415km radius, and comprised of an additional ICHO, a state housing organisation (SHO) and community housing organisations (CHOs). Differing locales present

service providers with their own set of challenges that are not necessarily evident within other regions; and it was considered that these discrete challenges would add to the richness of data and provide comparable insights into the intricate nature of service provision across locations. For instance, many regional CHOs establish strong connections with their local communities and tenant populations. These connections were bolstered by local and cultural knowledge, and were underpinned by understanding the complex and multidimensional issues tenants face within mainstream and traditional communities. Conceivably, the inter-relational nature between service providers and community members may enhance or inhibit housing workers' abilities to address conflictual tenancy issues. Conversely, in most metropolitan settings, due in part to the transient nature of some accommodation tenures offered, service providers often have limited knowing of and connection with their tenants. The high volume of tenancy managed in the metropolitan setting sits alongside many service providers' limited understanding of the complexities some of their Indigenous tenants face daily. While opportunities to access organisations in diverse locations was primarily due to the initial recruitment dilemma faced at the beginning of the fieldwork stage, this proved to be fortuitous due to the salience of locale-specific challenges that provided another layer of context around the role of cultural difference in the frontline of professional interactions between service providers and Indigenous service users and tenants.

#### 4.5.3 Sample

The sample included 31 participants from differing racialised subjectivities and backgrounds; operating within regional and metropolitan settings. Over two thirds of the sample were from Euro-Australian backgrounds, they were female and employed largely in mainstream community housing organisations. These housing officers were employed across a range of professional roles that are regulated by diverse organisational settings, with most of them located at the staff/client interface of service provision (see Table 4-2).

**Table 4-2: Participant profile (N=31)**

<b>Gender (n)</b>	<b>Participant's (n) Cultural Background</b>	<b>Participant's role</b>	<b>Experience in social housing (years)</b>	<b>Participants (n)working in specific organisations</b>
<i>Male</i> 6	<i>Indigenous Aust.</i> 4	<i>Senior Managers</i> 5	<2yrs      14	<i>ICHO</i> 6
<i>Female</i> 25	<i>Euro-Aust.</i> 21	<i>Operational Supervisors</i> 5	<5yrs      8	<i>CHO</i> 23
	<i>Cultural-minority</i> 6	<i>Frontline workers</i> 21	<10yrs      2	<i>SHO</i> 2
			>10yrs      7	

ICHO- Indigenous community housing organisations

CHO- Community housing organisations

SHO- State housing organisations

Whilst a large majority of the sample were from Euro-Australian backgrounds, the small cultural diversity within the sample provided the study with a point of comparison. It extended its analytical power to determine the role of race in understandings of difference and how it comparatively shapes the interactional space between service providers, service user and tenant. Additionally, comparative analysis offered valuable insights into the cultural-specific experiences of housing officers working within housing policy parameters and organisational context.

#### 4.5.4 Interview instrumentation

Due to the inherently sensitive nature of the questions being asked of respondents, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were deemed the most valuable qualitative method, offering the best approach to address this study's research questions. The interview questions were designed to elicit answers around participants' understandings of racialised differences and/or similarities, and the effects these understandings have on the decisions they make.

Essentially, they were race-based questions that may have been perceived by participants as judgemental in nature, despite best intentions by me to avoid this. Unlike other research methods such as surveys or focus groups, the in-depth interview process provided the co-constructed space needed to explore participants' intimate, and potentially confronting, understandings of sensitive issues around cultural difference and race relations. It is within these explorations that rapport was built, through the fostering of respectful and considered engagement within a safe and supportive milieu that encouraged dialogue and open communication. The following section details the construction of the topic guide and

subsequent interview questions as well as describing how rapport and respectful interactions were established throughout the interview process.

#### 4.5.5 Topic guide

A well-designed topic guide provides flexible direction to the fieldwork process and therefore is strongly recommended within qualitative research designs. As Arthur and Nazroo (2003: 115) contend, good topic guides ‘ensure relevant issues are covered systematically and with some uniformity, while allowing flexibility to pursue the detail that is salient to each individual participant’. The topic guide created for this research was used as a mechanism to steer the discussion within the interview process, not as a prescription for the questions to be asked. The objectives of the guide were to explore participants’ perspectives around the following four themes:

- (i) understanding of cultural difference;
- (ii) views on how cultural difference influences service delivery;
- (iii) views on service organisation’s policies and procedures; and
- (iv) views on culturally appropriate service delivery.

Participants were informed (see Appendix Two) the interviews would cover the following topics:

- (i) their experiences and understandings of front-line service provision with Indigenous clients;
- (ii) their understanding of cultural similarities and differences, between participants and Indigenous service users;
- (iii) how participants personally experience and negotiate any cultural similarities and differences;
- (iv) their views on how the policies and operational procedures of their organisation influence these interactions and their outcomes;
- (v) the meanings, understandings and values they attach to culturally appropriate service delivery; and

- (vi) their experiences on how cultural similarities and differences influence the delivery of tenancy management services to Indigenous service users and the impact this has on their tenancy sustainability.

As directed by Arthur and Nazroo (2003), importance was placed on the order in which topics were approached and the consequent structure of the interview process. One of the main objectives was for the interview discussion to run smoothly and it was determined the best way to facilitate this was to ensure issues were discussed in some organised progression with logical structuring.

#### 4.5.6 Interview process

The nature of the interview questions required careful consideration of how to ease participants gently into the interview process. It was essential to create a space that allowed for them to openly share their experiences. Focusing in on the social conventions of hosting, upon meeting and welcoming participants for the first time, I offered them a drink and/or a Tim Tam biscuit as a way of setting up a welcoming atmosphere, and in the hope of developing rapport and potentially making the process a little less formal. Many participants happily accepted one or more biscuits and this allowed some time for us to engage in general conversation before commencing the interview. Some pre-interview conversations lasted as long as 13 minutes, however, mostly the duration was between 3-10 minutes. During this time, general small talk plus the aims of the research, confidentiality and anonymity, as well as how interview data would be disseminated, were discussed. Additionally, participants were asked if they had any questions or comments regarding the research, and they were also asked if they consented to the interview being audio recorded.

#### 4.5.7 Face-to-face interviews

Twenty-four face-to-face interviews were conducted with their duration ranging between 48 and 70 minutes, with the majority running for around 60 minutes. It was especially important that a flexible and conversational approach was adopted to allow for engagement with the notions of race and cultural difference within the interview process. The questions guiding the interview comprised a general starter question asking participants to define their role within the organisation and detailing what it involved. This proved to be an effective 'warm up' question and was particularly useful in creating a sense of ease which proved invaluable as it quickly established participants as the 'experts' and the researcher as the 'inquirer'.

This question encouraged the dialogue to flow; without exception, participants embraced the opportunity to discuss their positions and articulate the numerous organisational requirements and expectations of their role. The response to this question garnered crucial information regarding participants' employment history and their professional position within the organisation. Respondents' narratives offered insights into their enthusiasm, or lack of it, for their position and the organisation more generally. The question effectively opened the door for a deeper exploration of respondents' intercultural practice, as subsequent questions explored their understandings of the nexus between Indigenous tenants' cultural needs and social housing service provision requirements. Furthermore, the remaining questions drilled down to the micro-interactional space of professional practice, exploring how respondents understood their own racialised identities, and their perceptions of its influence on professional interactions with Indigenous service users and clients.

These question around the role of respondents' racial identities on their professional practice were, at times, difficult to ask and proved to be one of the trickiest questions within the interview schedule. The dialogue was often stilted, either through respondents' lack of understanding about the question, and/or their dismissal of the relevance of race within the parameters of professional practice. Conversely, some respondents understood the questions, however, they conceded that they had rarely given the concept of their racial identity-and how this constructed their ideas of cultural difference-much consideration. To address the difficulties some respondents had in answering the question about the influence their own cultural background played in their professional engagement with Indigenous homeless people and tenants, I used examples from my own habitus. I shared with respondents how my father's meticulous care of the family home, lawns and hedges set up my own expectations, behaviours and judgements around the notion of caring for a home. I used this simple example to demonstrate the profound influence this had on constructing my axiological standpoint around the concept of home. Often after my disclosure respondents spoke of their childhood experiences that shaped their axiological standpoints in regard to their constructions of difference. Due to the conversational nature of the semi-structured interviews and the limited timeframe (usually around 60 minutes) when respondents appeared to be uncomfortable I moved on to the next question and conversely, when they were willing to reflect, I provided the space for that.

Notably, for most respondents from Indigenous or cultural minority backgrounds an apparent defensiveness and, at times, impatience was evident when discussing cultural differences.

Respondents were often hesitant when answering these questions which was indicated by their body language-such as crossing arms and/or legs and shifting frequently in their seats. I read participants' reluctance to talk about difference as potentially linked to their racialised experiences of discrimination and social exclusion, as it became clear respondents preferred to discuss similarities inherent in all peoples, rather than elucidate the difference between. Responding to these cues, I moved from personal reflections on cultural differences to the tenancy issues that occur because of Indigenous cultural expectations. I chose to explore the issue of crowdedness, as the notion of high occupancy in Indigenous households was unequivocally identified by participants as a key cultural issue affecting the management of Indigenous tenants. I drew on my grandmothers' life detailing how she and her eight children lived in a three-bedroom house, and how in her time it was considered the norm. This example was explored in varying degrees with most respondents when discussing issues of crowdedness and proved, at times, invaluable in the discussion of social changes and the positive experiences of big families sharing a home. Generally, the discussion effortlessly led into participants sharing their understandings about the juxtaposition between housing policy, organisational procedures and Indigenous cultural norms and behaviours. Framing questions within this context proved to be an extremely useful strategy as it removed the attention from participants' subjectivities and sensibilities and placed the focus on their opinions about organisational policies and cultural training processes, and effectively freed up the dialogue between us.

I also experienced discomfort when asking questions around race and cultural practices. For example, as a Euro-Australian researcher interviewing Euro-Australian participants, who were often reflecting upon how they provided services for the problematic Indigenous tenant, I realised this white normative gaze co-constructed white 'knowing' of Indigenous culture and behaviours. This was particularly concerning as I knew the data would potentially add to the voluminous cannon of Eurocentric narratives problematising Indigeneity and cultural differences.

Some participants seemingly assumed that our shared racialised identity meant that their pejorative judgements regarding Indigenous people and cultural practices generally, and Indigenous tenants more specifically, were permissible. These discussions presented a dilemma for me; on the one hand, I felt compelled to assertively challenge the racial stereotypes and assumptions many of respondents articulated, yet on the other hand, I intuitively 'knew' if I challenged participants' overtly racist comments, the rapport that had

been built and the flow of the participants' dialogue would effectively disappear. I reconciled this somewhat by acknowledging my position as an interviewer was neither to passively agree with, or conversely, confront participants about their racist ideas, noting that my primary objective was to provide the space for participants to share their experiences and ideas. It was the use of gentle probing to understand the context and my genuine curiosity around the genesis of some participants' overtly racist assumptions that tensions within the interview were successfully navigated.

Exploring race and cultural differences with participants from Indigenous and cultural minority backgrounds also presented me with some challenges. Understandings around cultural difference were profoundly polarised in the sense that my racialised background is entrenched in a system of unearned societal and structural privileges, vastly contrasting with participants' experiences of systematic societal and structural racialised exclusion, discrimination and marginalisation because of their culture difference. The division between our ontological standpoints was amplified through our discussions on cultural difference and race relations. At times, I felt like a voyeuristic intruder extracting information about how white culture had caused pain and social harm to those deemed culturally different from the hegemonic cultural norm. Additionally, in some of the earlier interviews when respondents drew attention to cultural issues that were problematic, I tended to hold white cultural expectations and values responsible for any issues. By demonising white culture as solely responsible for *all* issues, I unintentionally put forward my deep-seated ideas that Indigenous people are victim to the power and oppression of white mainstream society. In doing so, I unwittingly dismissed the power and agency Indigenous people have over their own decisions and behaviours. Realising that this approach may have stifled further investigations into how these cultural problems materialised in the context of service provision and management of tenancies, I was determined to listen to respondents' understandings and experiences of the problems that cultural practices and behaviours caused. This created the space for discussions on the impact of cultural differences.

After exploring the particularly sensitive issues within the interview schedule, the interview concluded with a general question which sought to investigate participants' practice wisdoms and opinions on what they deemed necessary to work effectively within the social housing sector and with Indigenous clients. The last interview questions finished where the first had commenced: by situating respondents in the role of expert, encouraging them to share their professional insight and experiences. After the completion of the interviews with the audio



recorder turned off, many participants chose to continue speaking with me, which potentially indicated that some level of rapport was developed throughout the interview process.

Legard et al., (2003: 142) state, ‘in-depth interviewing makes a number of demands on the mental and intellectual abilities of the interviewer’, noting the importance of the interviewer’s ability to listen, digest and comprehend participants’ answers in order to decide how to probe further. These skills were put to the test many times; particularly when several interviews were conducted in one day (the most being five, the average was between three and four and the minimum was two). Furthermore, the seven in-depth telephone interviews that were conducted from an office in Tasmania, speaking to respondents in Queensland, presented their own set of challenges.

#### 4.5.8 Telephone interviews

The operationalisation of the interviewing schedule for the telephone interviews was consistent with the FTF interviews, although there were many challenges and barriers specifically associated with conducting interviews via the telephone. The primary challenge was to overcome the void created by the lack of researcher/participants’ physical presence within the interview space. The lack of opportunities to build rapport without physical presence and to observe participants’ response to questions, based on their body language proved an obstacle; however, it was not insurmountable although it did require more creativity and reflexivity within the exploration of interview questions. Conversely, the physical invisibility of researcher and participants potentially cultivated deeper exploration of inherently sensitive topics within the interview process as physical responses remained unobserved.

Conversation did prove to be less fluid than FTF interviews due to my inability to read physical cues, consequently culminating in many interruptions by me during participants’ responses to interview questions. This effectively stifled parts of the dialogue but did not bring it to a complete standstill. Equally challenging was the lack of conversational flow between me and participants from cultural minority backgrounds. Primarily, the challenges were evident in my ability to communicate effectively, as often cultural pronunciations were difficult to interpret and for many respondents, unlike myself, English was not their first language. Despite these challenges, the spatial and temporal convenience of conducting telephone interviews outweighed any challenges and barriers to communication. The data garnered from those interviews offered additional and invaluable insight into housing service

providers' subjective understandings of their racialised identities and its influence on their professional practice.

All interviews were manually transcribed-verbatim-by me, as I determined this as the best method to familiarise myself with the data, providing an understanding of both the phenomena under investigation and the situated narratives of participants. Once transcription was completed participants that could be reached were contacted via telephone or emails to ascertain whether they would like a copy of their interview transcript. Over half of respondents (n=16) were sent copies of their transcripts via email. None of the participants requested their interview data be edited or withdrawn from the study.

## 4.6 Data

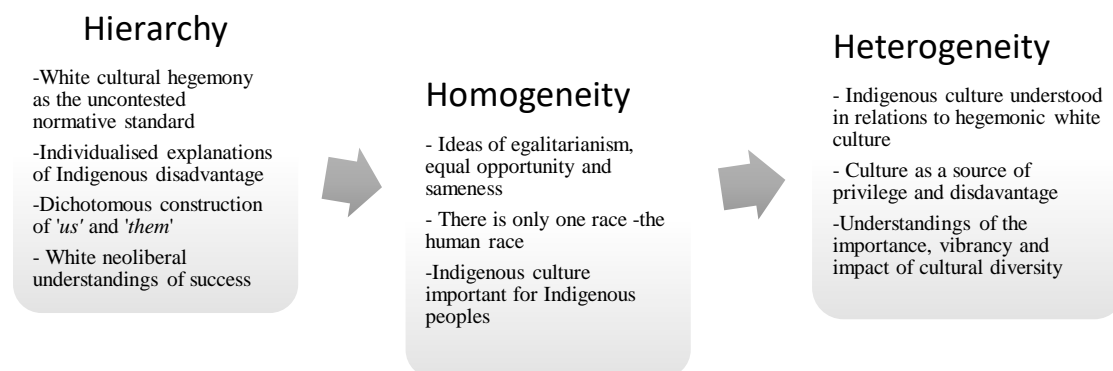
The volume of raw data generated from 31 in-depth interviews posed a significant challenge for addressing the central task of reducing the data to a coherent account of what was found. Through the transcription process, I gained an extensive knowledge of the respondents' narratives. The process of making meaning and sense of these accounts started with applying each dimensional category of the labyrinth of racialised subjectivities and professional interactions to the interview transcripts. To describe the relevance of the labyrinth to the study's integrity, the research drew on the concept of 'the analytical hierarchy' presented in the writings of Spencer et al. (2003). The analytical hierarchy is 'a form of conceptual scaffolding ... made up of a series of viewing platforms, each of which involves different analytical tasks, enabling the researcher to gain an overview and make sense of the data' (Spencer et al., 2003: 213). Seen through the eyes of Spencer et al., (2003: 217) the analytical hierarchy:

refers to the process through which qualitative 'findings' are built from the original raw data ... The analytic process requires three forms of activity; data management in which the raw data are retrieved, labelled, sorted and synthesised; descriptive accounts in which the analyst makes use of the ordered data to identify key dimensions, map the range and diversity of each phenomenon and develop classifications and typologies; and explanatory accounts in which the analyst builds explanations about why the data takes the forms that are found and presented.

Using Spencer et al.'s analytical hierarchy, this thesis positioned the labyrinth as the foundational platform for the study's analysis. The following section provides details into how categories were developed from applying the labyrinth to the raw data.

All the dimensions of the labyrinth were assigned a specific colour, with each colour manually applied to the hardcopies of the interview transcripts. For example, race habitus was coloured-coded pink and indications of respondents' axiological standpoints that spoke of their beliefs, values, dispositions, together with the way they were brought up, were highlighted in pink. This was replicated for each component of the labyrinth. After applying the concepts from the labyrinth to the respondents' narratives, the synthesised data was used to construct descriptive accounts. The identification and refinement of key categories through the reiteration process led to the development of categories, providing another platform for the analytical hierarchy. Constructed from patterns within the data, three key categories- hierarchy, homogeneity and heterogeneity- illuminated respondents' standpoints about their racialised identities, and their constructed understandings of cultural differences and/or similarities and its influence on their professional practice. The following diagram illustrates the key characteristics that constructed the categories on the continuum.

**Figure 4-2: The Continuum of Racial Understandings of Difference**



Respondents' cognisance of cultural differences, the value they attached to these-generally and more specifically in the context of housing provision-together with the narratives they employed to define them, located their understandings along the continuum of racial understandings of difference. Whilst the continuum presented separate and discrete dimensions, respondents' narratives comprised multiple understandings of cultural difference, from various standpoints, that 'dipped' in and between continuum categories.

Each of these categories, and the personal and professional biographies constructing them are discussed in extensive detail in the following chapters.

## 4.7 White researcher in a black/white research milieu

Motivated to create a respectful interaction space within the interview process required me to pay careful attention to my racialised habitus, my professional agenda and to recognise how these shaped the questions I asked and the way I responded to them (Roulston, 2010; Connolly & Harms, 2012). Arber (2000) suggests that it is difficult for researchers to write about others if they do not understand themselves. My identity is inextricably linked to fundamental beliefs in social justice that are driven by a strong desire for human rights, dignity and equity to be available for all peoples. While I perceive this to be a positive trait, it has also unwittingly constructed Indigenous peoples as victims to the white regime of hegemonic Australian society.

I have collected evidence for this construction throughout my academic career. However, these understandings exclude social or professional engagement with Indigenous peoples. Additionally, I have created an idea of myself as the good white anti-racist woman, who sits in opposition to those who do not recognise their white privilege. My way of thinking and being in the world means I had preconceived ideas about the Indigenous respondents in my study. At times, I found it difficult to understand why some participants from cultural minority or Indigenous backgrounds appeared to lack compassion for some of their tenants' situational circumstances. Within the interview process I drew attention to the societal issues that may be influencing certain behaviours, whilst participants often drew attention to the agency of people, and their capacity to enact change in their lives. Upon reflection, these understandings indicated a more respectful and compassionate approach than the one I adopted. To be clear, the intersection between the power of hegemonic societal normative expectations and Indigenous people's disadvantage and marginalisation was visible to these respondents, however, their primary focus was on exploring Indigenous people's capacity to be agents of change.

Throughout the study, I was critically aware that my voice ultimately informed the interpretation of the data and understandings of how service providers construct ideas of cultural differences and providing services for Indigenous tenants. At times, there was a tendency for me to assume that some of the difficulties that many Euro-Australian service

providers had with Indigenous tenants was because of their race privilege and racist attitudes. I eventually acknowledged this as a harsh and un-constructive interpretation and through reflection around respondents' narratives I began to understand that difficulties were multidimensional; race did play a role but it was not the only dominant factor.

Reminding myself constantly that the aim of the study was to provide context around experiential understandings of cultural differences, I was able to conceptually 'step into the shoes' of service providers, albeit briefly, and understand the tensions, conflicts and rewards of their roles. Conversely, as a person who rents a home, at times I compared the difference in how service providers describe their professional practice and judged them to be a good or a bad service provider. This often led to contrasting thoughts of either 'it would be great to have you as my tenancy officer', or alternatively, 'I would have huge issues with you as my service provider', during the interview process.

My position as a white woman, coming from working class background, who is currently engaged within the university sector inextricably shaped the way I read respondents' narratives and the analysis I performed. Ethically, at both the personal and professional levels, I deeply reflected upon and considered my stereotypical assumptions and used these insights to alleviate, as much as possible, their impact on my interpretation of the data and representations of respondents.

## 4.8 Ethical considerations

This research fully adhered to ethical requirements and stipulations of Tasmania Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee (Ethics reference number H0012915). Measures were taken to ensure informed consent and to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of respondents and the collected data. The research addressed three important ethical considerations that Habibis (2006) identifies as crucial to sociological research: consent, integrity and research safety. In order to ensure respondents' confidentiality and anonymity were maintained I de-identified the data through the use of pseudonyms.

This project required a full risk application with Tasmania Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee, partly due to ethical considerations specific to participants, and the potential risk that the research questions may cause harm, discomfort or inconvenience for participants. It was highly probable that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples would participate in the research, therefore it was critical that I addressed 'issues of research design,

ethics, culture and language’ and demonstrated ‘respect for and valuing of cultural and language diversity’ (Australian Government National Health and Medical Research Council, 2007: 39). I also was required to address how I would mitigate any potential harms, discomfort or inconvenience caused to participants in my Ethics application.

The inherently sensitive topics covered within this research and the potential for participants’ understandings to be judged negatively demanded that I demonstrate respect and humility when exploring these topics. This required that I ‘step down’ from the sanctimonious anti-racist ‘good whitey’ position and adopt a more reflective and considered approach. For example, I reflected deeply on the potential judgements I may have around property maintenance and high occupancy, anti-social behaviour and the like. This created a sense of empathy for the challenges that many housing officers may face.

It was crucial to the integrity and authenticity of the study that participants’ narratives and understandings were represented fully and contextualised within broader societal mechanisms, understandings, mores and practices. Ethically, it was especially important to locate pejorative racialised accounts not only within individual understandings but also in acknowledgement of the societal forces that may drive them. I was determined not to seek out the ‘racist’ housing service provider, nevertheless the existence of individual racist behaviour, ideologies and practice were undeniable within the narratives of many participants interviewed. Nonetheless, one of the main objectives of this research was to unpack and interpret how these ideologies may have been formed and the structural legacies that sustain them.

## 4.9 Conclusion

This chapter outlines the methodological and conceptual framework along with the methods utilised to explore the research topic. I have discussed the benefits of broadly locating the research within an interpretative social constructionism paradigm and I provide an overview of the significant, practical and methodological rationale for employing in-depth interviews as an empirical qualitative research strategy. The research was qualitative and exploratory in nature. Thirty- one in-depth interviews were conducted with housing service providers from Indigenous, Euro-Australian and ethically-diverse cultural backgrounds. These participants were employed in a range of organisations across state, community and Indigenous-specific housing organisations in metropolitan and regional Queensland.

Committed to the task of understanding and contextualising racial subjectivities, the research combined two theoretical paradigms; critical race theory (CRT)-specifically whiteness theory-and Bourdieu's theory of practice [(habitus)(capital)+field =practice] (1972). These theories were combined into a theoretical model of understanding how race intersects with each component of Bourdieu's theory of practice. This led to the development of the racial labyrinth of subjectivities and professional practice which provided an analytical tool for understanding the intra-relational, multi-layered constructions of housing providers' subjective and professional understanding of cultural difference and how this influences their interactions with service users and tenants. The labyrinth was used to facilitate data analysis.

The process of analysing and interpreting the data started with applying each dimension of the labyrinth of racialised subjectivities and professional practice to the interview transcripts. This resulted in the identification of a continuum of racial understanding of difference along with respondents' understanding of their own racial identity, and the significance of cultural difference (or sameness) for their professional practice, could be identified. The analysis suggested there were three key approaches to the way racial understandings were applied to their engagement with Indigenous tenants: hierarchy, homogeneity and heterogeneity. Each approach reflected respondents' cognisance of the nature of the cultural differences between them and Indigenous service users and tenants, and the value and significance of this for the way they applied housing policy and practice. The following chapter explores the social housing field to provide the context around respondents' experiential understandings of providing services for Indigenous tenants and details the multifarious tasks respondents reported as part of their role as social housing service providers.

## **5 Respondents' experiences of the field of social housing**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Bourdieu understood the social world as divided into distinct arenas or 'fields' of practice, each comprising its own set of rules, knowledges and forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1975). Whilst fields often overlap, he suggests they are mostly autonomous from the other, each having its own set of positions and practices as well as struggles for those positions. Therefore, a social field is perceived as a 'locus of struggles' (Bourdieu, 1975: 19), where actors utilise their capital to stake claims within a network of positions (Walther, 2014). Bourdieu's 'fields of practice' have been broadly applied to the social housing field within this study to describe how the policy and institutional contexts shape respondents' experiences of service delivery to Indigenous service users and tenants. All of respondents, irrespective of their current positions within the field, had experiential understandings of frontline service delivery, and it is these reported understandings that are drawn upon to highlight how they experienced the field of social housing. This chapter establishes the field of social housing as a racially constructed terrain where respondents are required to use their experiences within the field to enact their various forms of capital in the navigation of competing demands between mainstream housing policy agendas, institutional procedures and professional requirements.

To form an understanding around how these competing expectations shaped respondents' experiences, within and of the field, it was important to examine the circumstances and the respective social spaces where these experiences were produced. For example, I identified there were three distinct social spaces in which respondents performed their roles; the internal organisational space; the external stakeholder space; and frontline service delivery. Within the internal organisational space respondents were required to effectively engage with institutional hierarchy including management, board members, as well as their colleagues. Respondents negotiated the external stakeholder space by collaboratively engaging with stakeholders and a variety of external agents including real estate agents, landlords, social workers, culturally-specific agencies and government organisations. At the frontline of service delivery respondents negotiated micro-interactions with Indigenous service users and tenants.



Another finding of the research was service providers were not only required to foster and negotiate intra and inter professional relationships within these spaces, they often competed within them for limited material resources. For example, one respondent spoke of the negotiations that took place within the internal organisational space, suggesting, ‘so a property comes up ... that we want to rent out to a tenant and then ... [we] go and get three prospective tenants based on their needs ... [and] the allocation panel ... sit round ... a ... table [to] discuss the tenants and then the lucky ones get a phone call’ (Ian). With limited properties available, and increasing demand for those, Ian spoke of the competition that occurred within the internal organisational space, where he and his colleagues competed to procure accommodation for their prospective tenants. It is within this milieu service providers’ experiences of the field can be seen to have promoted or inhibited their efficacy to meet organisational requirements and manage housing tenures for Indigenous clients.

The data indicated respondents’ professional experiences were shaped by their positions and practices as well as the struggles of their specific field. Moreover, the findings throughout this chapter demonstrate that respondents’ experiences within the field were instrumental in shaping their understandings of cultural difference, and influenced the way they delivered services to Indigenous clients. The following section presents how the changing nature of Indigenous housing policy, and the increasingly punitive rules and regulations that govern social housing in Queensland, shaped respondents’ experiences of their frontline interactions within the field.

## 5.2 Mainstreaming Indigenous housing services in Queensland: creating barriers for culturally responsive service provision

The field of Indigenous social housing has undergone substantial change in the last two decades most significantly as a result of the mainstreaming of Indigenous housing services (Habibis et al., 2016a; Nash, 2016). This was something that concerned many of those respondents who had experienced these changes. They described the changes as creating regulatory barriers that inhibited their abilities to navigate the cultural needs of Indigenous tenants within the parameters of mainstream housing policies and institutional procedures.

Since 2004, the Australian government has been mainstreaming Indigenous housing policies and programs. For example, SOMIH was merged within ‘public housing policies and service deliver under the One Social Housing System (OSHS) in 2005-06’ (Nash, 2016: 9). With the

introduction of the OHS, the Queensland state government's agenda was to integrate service delivery and align policy 'across state -funded public, community and Indigenous housing. Core reforms included allocations from a common housing register, alignment and tightening of eligibility, prioritisation, and rent policies' (Milligan et al., 2011: 51). These reforms have the potential to impact respondents' engagement within the internal organisational space, as well as their collaboration within the external stakeholder space and furthermore they are critical in shaping frontline service delivery with Indigenous clients and tenants.

A change of government in Queensland in 2012, saw housing and homelessness services integrated into the state government portfolio, the Department of Housing and Public Works (DHPW). As part of this approach the Newman government developed the Housing 2020 strategy. This strategy was focused on integrating the delivery of housing services, especially through partnerships with non-government organisations (NGOs) (Nash, 2016), as part of addressing the concerns that 'an ageing property portfolio, growing demand for housing assistance and a lack of available properties' presents the government with specific challenges in managing the social housing sector (QCMD 2012 cited in Nash, 2016: 9). Conceivably, in a service delivery setting where the demand for housing assistance is soaring and availability of housing stock is dwindling, the concerns of the government are most strongly felt by housing workers delivering housing services to homeless and tenant populations. Moreover, for participants in this study, these challenges were further complicated because respondents were required to deliver mainstream housing services that were, by definition, unresponsive to the cultural needs of Indigenous tenants.

This is an especially important point considering how many Indigenous peoples and Indigenous households are reliant on some form of social housing for accommodation in Queensland (see

Table 5-1). As of 30 June 2013, across Queensland, 5791 Indigenous peoples were on the waiting list for public housing (AIHW, 2014a), with over 24 per cent of Indigenous households in social housing.

**Table 5-1: Mainstream and targeted social housing provided to Indigenous households in Queensland, 30 June 2013.**

Type of Social Housing	Number of Indigenous households (a)	Percentage of Indigenous households (b)
<b>Mainstream social housing provided for Indigenous households</b>		
<i>Public</i>	5,791	9.4
<i>Community</i>	1,039	1.7
<b>Targeted Indigenous social housing</b>		
<i>State owned and managed Indigenous housing (SOMIH)</i>	3, 286	5.4
<i>Indigenous community housing (ICH)</i>	4, 777(c)	7.8
<b>Total social housing</b>	<b>14,893</b>	<b>24.2</b>

Sources: AIHW(2014); SCRGSP 2014: tables 17A.4, 17A.5 & 17A.7; AIHW National Housing Assistance Data Repository (AIHW, 2014a :8).

- (a) These data were provided by the jurisdiction; they were used instead of the data calculated from the AIHW's Public Rental Housing data collection due to an under-count in the unit record data.
- (b) Data on the total number of Indigenous households that were used to derive the rates are estimated household counts based on data from the ABS 2011 Census and ABS projections of growth in household numbers.
- (c) Data for improvised dwellings were not available.

In just over a decade, Queensland's Indigenous housing service sector has significantly reduced from 116 ICHOs in 2001 to 91 in 2006 and down to 33 in 2012 (Habibis et al., 2016 a: 20). Whilst it is well document how the decline in the Indigenous housing sector and the ongoing trend toward mainstreaming Indigenous housing options causes tensions and uncertainties within the field and dissatisfaction among Indigenous tenants (Milligan et al., 2011; Habibis et al., 2016a), there is a notable gap in the literature around the implication these have for how service providers experience the field and the impact on the way they deliver services to Indigenous clients. This chapter presents data that addresses these shortfalls, beginning with an examination of how institutional settings create constraints or alternatively, flexibility, around respondents' abilities to engage with Indigenous tenants and negotiate any potential challenges that may be affecting tenancy management.

### 5.3 The location of respondents within the social housing field

Some of the factors that significantly shaped respondents' day to day experiences within the field included the geographic locations of the organisations they worked for, be it regional or metropolitan; the type of organisation, for example, ICHOs, CHOs or SHOs that respondents were employed with; together with the tenure types they managed such as crisis accommodation, transitional or long term accommodation within boarding houses, units, high density complexes or houses. For those respondents working in metropolitan settings, their Indigenous tenants generally resided in high density studio units or boarding houses where often they were sharing facilities such as bathrooms and/or kitchens. The social dynamics within these tenures added a level of complexity for service providers that was not apparent for those respondents managing smaller regional tenancies. Lauren explained:

I mean just having so many tenants just living so close together, they've from all different walks of life so ... people are just so different and disputes are just constant as well ... I spend most of my day just getting phone calls from my tenants ... I have complaints from neighbours.

Ruby illustrated how managing Indigenous tenancies within high density complexes presented specific challenges. She reflected:

I have had an Indigenous tenant ... [in] ... a small one bedroom studio ... I think there was a single female who had a daughter and three children all wanted to come and stay for a number of weeks in a one bedroom studio ... it's one small square room with a double bed, and a single couch ... there simply just wasn't physical room to ... house that many people in such a small space and in that instance the complex had shared hot water systems, so that was an issue that was impacting on being able to shower five people as opposed to one and the impact that had on the others sharing the hot water in the complex at that time.

Additionally, the amount of tenancies and the type of services respondents manage considerably influences the manner in which they interacted with Indigenous service users and tenants. For example, some respondents managed the Community Rental Scheme (CRS) program within their role. This housing assistance program is funded by the Queensland Government through the Department of Housing and Public Works.

The scheme funds not-for-profit community organisations to provide transitional housing to eligible applicants who have been assessed by the department as having very high or high housing needs. Transitional housing is not long-term housing.

Providers assist their tenants to stabilise their circumstances and move on to the private market or longer term social housing. Community Rent Scheme providers rent properties from private landlords or the department, and then lease them to tenants (DHPW, 2016:1).

Lynne claimed the tenants that she managed within CRS program were ‘people that are coming out of institutions, jail, psychiatric institutions ... pensioners high to highest needs anyone ... health issues, mental health ... physically unhealthy so they’re the highest of high needs’. In addition, Rebekah’s explanation of her understanding of the CRS program drew attention to the complex and frustrating nature of the scheme for service providers and potentially tenants:

It’s a funny system because when they [Department of Housing] assess them... they say are you sleeping in a car then you know you are very high needs but then you’re housed but a lot of tenants obviously they have long term issues which mean they are not going to be able to go and get a private rental so if you exist them they’ll go and sleep in their car again, which is a vicious cycle ... we are supposed to have tenancy plans in place to help them exist into the private real estate market but sometimes there are ... things that are just too difficult because a lot of the tenants don’t want to interact with the housing office, they don’t want to go in there [Department of Housing] , so they ignore letters or they don’t go out of their way to get information that would bring them up to a high needs status again ... they [Department of Housing] have ... had a bit of a crackdown and said ok we have all these moderate needs tenants and we’ve had to just issue notices to leave ... you get people that are very upset and they’ll come back and say I can’t leave the property and ... they are very justified, they genuinely can’t go back into private real estate ...so you have to ... calm people down, you have to write letters for them, refer them to other agencies ... that’s quite time consuming.

These narratives demonstrate how respondents managing high density complexes were presented with specific challenges. These respondents claimed that a significant part of their day was spent responding to neighbour complaints. For example, they were required to ascertain the validity of the complaint and determine how to effectively mediate between the people involved. Often mediation placed respondents in situations involving conflict, which added an extra degree of difficulty to an already demanding role. Respondents managing the CRS program also drew attention to the challenges of managing their portfolios. Many spoke of the perceived irony of securing temporary accommodation for high needs homeless

people, which then meant they were no longer deemed high needs on the Department of Housing wait list. However, once tenants exited their temporary accommodation, they potentially faced long periods of homelessness because their needs status had dropped on the DOH wait list. Respondents within the CRS program often found this situation particularly frustrating and difficult aspect of their role.

The following section explores the diversity within the social housing field in which respondents were located and draws upon some examples to present the challenges facing these respondents in managing the conflicts and tension often present at the frontline of service delivery to Indigenous populations.

Nine discrete housing organisations, across regional and metropolitan Queensland, comprise the social housing field that respondents were in within this study. Across geographical settings there was little variation between the representation of respondents working in metropolitan (n=4) and regional (n=5) organisations, however there were significant differences in the way respondents experienced these fields in regional and metropolitan settings and the influence this had on their professional interactions with Indigenous service users and tenants. The following section compares respondents' experiences of managing Indigenous tenancies for those respondents working in regional and metropolitan settings. The data suggests that those respondents working in metropolitan settings face specific challenges where they were more likely to manage larger movements of Indigenous peoples through the types of tenures they provided, compared to their regional counterparts. Furthermore, respondents in metropolitan settings suggested they had limited access to culturally specific support in their management of Indigenous tenancies and this added extra pressures to an already demanding role.

The study found that respondents in regional settings were employed either within CHOs or ICHOs, and they generally managed significantly smaller portfolios than their metropolitan counterparts and often provided services for tenants in long-term accommodation. One respondent managing 35 tenancies spoke of her comparative luxury in being able to build rapport with tenants, unlike her perception of housing officers, in metropolitan settings, with larger portfolios. As Katrina explained:

It is getting to a point where housing workers have that much pressure to perform all these things that they don't have time to ... have that connection with their tenants ... I love helping my tenants .... like everywhere you are going to get

your problem tenants and ... pull your hair out sometimes .... it is not all rosy and stuff but ... you still need to be able to work with them and if you don't have that time to do that and the time to put into your tenant you are going to get nowhere ... you are never going to fix the problems that are there.

However, for most respondents predominately in metropolitan settings managing over 100 tenancies, having enough 'hours in the day for what people do, or are expected to do' (Paul), presented a major challenge for their daily practice. Noreen pointed to her professional struggles, suggesting that:

It's a very busy role ... and time is our enemy in this job because it is a large job with a large amount of tenancies ... I really don't like it when you are so busy because there is such a workload, that I feel like I can't do my job properly ... I feel quite deflated ... in my own expectations of myself and my service ... there's such a lot of work.

Managing the tensions between doing the job 'properly' by 'trying to find ways to operate better in those timeframes ... not to sort of cut things' (Paul), was an increasingly difficult challenge for respondents who by definition, were the providers of a scarce resource, working in settings where the juxtaposition between meeting institutional and client demands creates difficult and often unattainable expectations. Most respondents within the study articulated the professional and personal struggles inherent in the performance of their roles. For many they reconciled these tensions by reassuring themselves 'you just do your best and at the end of the day, to stay sane, that's what you have to tell yourself, you did your best' (Noreen). Doing their best necessitated that they met increasing institutional and administrative expectations, managed their portfolios and supported tenants to sustain their tenancies. The blurring of the boundaries between tenancy management and providing support for tenants, placed additional demands on respondents, causing considerable concerns for some. As Hannah identified:

we are not social workers, and we can't be social workers. We need to link people into support, but you can't do that unless you know what the issues are and ... there is this grey area of relationship building ... you've got to have some sort of clue on how to identify these kinds of things.

Lauren, who had previously worked for a real estate agent, explained:

coming from the private to the social is a bit of a change. Basically, in the real estate ... you didn't spend so much time on the tenants it was basically this is the legislation if they are in breach whatever, it was fairly black and white ... but here there's more grey areas because there is so many different situations ... tenants are working through different things and they are in social housing for a reason ... And sometimes we need to take certain things into consideration ... and how to approach people ... because before it was straight down the line ... this is how it is ... so it is a little bit of a challenge.

Both Hannah and Lauren identified the pressures of service delivery while Noreen explained how she managed these pressures, suggesting that her role:

is split up into three things, the property management side, the tenancy management so another words the arrears et cetera ... and also the people part of it, so to help the person maintain that tenancy. And sometimes that means identifying needs, our job is not one of being a support worker but it is to be able to identify needs and sometimes there's a lot of work that goes into being able to identify those needs ... before we actually link them in with support agencies.

The practicalities of 'linking' tenants in with support agencies was often deemed more difficult for those respondents working in metropolitan organisations, as encapsulated in Lorraine's recounting of her experiences:

it is so difficult in trying to find support for them ... really difficult ... out of the 113 properties probably a half a dozen of them are needing support ... I just cannot find anybody Indigenous that I can refer them to get support.

With limited options, Lorraine utilised the resources available to offer support for her tenants. She explained how one tenant:

I just want to talk to an Aboriginal person and I said ok I don't know where an Aboriginal person is that can ... help you, but these other people that have come they want to help you. Ok they're white people, but they want to help, they really, really do want to help. So, the head went down and she said alright so I said to her you don't have to see them if you really don't want to but you're going to have to pull up your



socks and you're going to behave because if you don't you're going to lose your house ... it's been two months now she has been good.

For many respondents in regional settings, there appeared to be more options for linking Indigenous tenants in with culturally responsive support, agencies and workers. For example, most respondents were either able to utilise their institutional capital, this being their experience and position in the field, or their race capital to address the gaps in mainstream service delivery and provided integrated support services for tenants in an attempt to create successful housing outcome for clients.

Most regional organisations in this study have been providing services for Indigenous peoples for up to 20 years, and furthermore, within these organisations the staff are from Indigenous and cultural minority backgrounds. The continuity of service provision, according to respondents' accounts, clearly establishes the organisation within the hub of the community and subsequently has the potential to provide management and staff with local knowledge and expertise garnered through many years of delivering services. The findings suggest there were significant benefits and support for respondents working within these type of organisations. For example, many non-Indigenous respondents gained deeper understandings of local cultural knowledges through engagement with Indigenous colleagues, and this was perceived to be invaluable for their understandings and the efficacy of their service provision. Deb, who managed temporary crisis accommodation for Indigenous women suggested:

as the only non-Indigenous worker ... I've learned a lot from my workers about cultural difference. I am very lucky to have strong Aboriginal and Islander women working for me because if ... cultural stuff comes up I will refer to them because they know it and understand it better than I do ... they'll be ... straight up with it. I couldn't work in an Indigenous service without good staff, without ... strong Aboriginal and Islander women to back me up because I do get the racist thing occasionally.

As highlighted in Deb's quote being surrounded by Indigenous colleagues allowed her to 'tap' into cultural knowledges, equipping her with understandings that influenced how she delivered services and interacted with tenants. Whilst the advantages were apparent for a non-Indigenous worker within a culturally diverse workforce, when it came to providing

services for Indigenous peoples, the same cannot necessarily be said for Indigenous workers in similar situations. As one Indigenous respondents explained, being the only Indigenous worker within an organisation, placed extra demands on an already demanding role. Gail discussed how non-Indigenous colleagues:

usually come straight to me and look this is what's going on can you come out and talk to them. I just do what they should be doing, you know just sit there listen, put the feelers out see what the situation is and ... respond accordingly. Sometimes I get frustrated with it because ... sometimes clients will say that they would like to speak to an Indigenous officer... but sometimes I just say to staff no I'm not going out you deal with them.

Gail also articulated frustration towards some Indigenous tenants who:

only want to speak with an Indigenous officer [and] sometimes I won't be available for hours and they'll wait ... or they will come back ... or they'll get me to ring them ... I'll ring them and it could be just a form, and I just think to myself why didn't you just ask for the form ... so in those circumstances I get really frustrated because it is just a waste of my time, a waste of my colleague's time and a waste of the client's time, like why would you sit around waiting for hours when you just want a form ... I don't understand that.

Gail's experience highlighted some critical issues. To begin with she was the only Indigenous employee working in her department within a metropolitan SHOs, and appeared to be the 'go to' Indigenous face of the organisation for both colleagues and Indigenous service users alike. Additionally, the quotes illuminated that presumably non-Indigenous service providers were either not confident or equipped to interact in a culturally-responsive way with Indigenous clients. Gail reflected:

most days I am fine with it, but some days I just think, no, I'm not going to see every Indigenous client ... I don't have the capacity to ... so sometimes I will go out there and ... they just want to hear from me, what my colleague has told them, and I say 'Yes that's right, what she has told you is right ... do you want to continue the conversation with me or do you want to continue it with her?' and they go, 'Oh she'll do' because ... as long as they hear that ... they are getting the right information.

The crucial issue in Gail's narrative was the underlying resistance, be it through fear, distrust and/or disregard, Indigenous clients may have when dealing solely with non-Indigenous service providers within the organisation. Conceivably, the legacy of white colonisation and dispossession played a significant part in the mistrust Indigenous peoples may have of government agents working in setting with no visible inclusion of Indigenous cultural artefacts or culturally-specific information. Within these contexts, it is understandable why some Indigenous clients would seek reassurance from an Indigenous worker. As Meredith, who was in a similar situation to Gail, in being the only Indigenous employee, although working for a metropolitan CHO, pointed out:

some people will say we want to talk to a black face you know what I mean ...  
and I'm happy to talk to anyone ... as long as I've got ... some clarity around  
that, what am I expected to do ... and I am resourced and all that sort of stuff.

Furthermore, many of the challenges associated with SHOs providing services for Indigenous tenants were explored by some of the respondents working in CHO and ICHO settings. For example, Rhianna who worked for a regional ICHO, claimed:

generally, I have noticed Indigenous people are uncomfortable in organisations with white people for example the Department of Housing. When we send them up there ... there is that generational mistrust of government organisations and ... the white man telling you what to do and judging and ... I often get feedback from ... people that I send up to the Department of Housing ... that they have gone up there and sort of been fobbed off because they haven't had the confidence to express themselves and the I guess the Department people are perhaps not trained in drawing out.

In addition, Ruby, who worked for a metropolitan CHO, reflected Rhianna's point when she suggested:

the Department staff ... had suffered the greatest change with this roll out of the current one social housing system that we are operating in now. Departmental staff ... were administrative workers ... they had not come from the human services field ... They had done training and had experiences in administrative skills and were placed in these roles. The community sector we're probably a

little more exposed ... because we ... certainly ... had closer linkages and closer working relationships with the support community.

Working under the OSHS presented significant challenges for respondents. For example, respondents who worked in one ICHO, where services are earmarked exclusively for Indigenous peoples, were required to manage housing stock owned by the organisation, as well as Department of Housing (DoH) stock. At times managing differing housing requirements proved difficult as explicated by Rhianna:

I hate looking after the Department properties, one because of the ridiculous amount of paper work and the dos and don'ts, and ... the rigidity of it ... we have had issues with ... people needing housing and they won't transfer them because they don't tick this box and that box and yet common sense would dictate move a single person in a three bedroom house into a two bedroom unit that is available because why wouldn't you.

Generally, for respondents in regional CHOs and ICHOs there appeared to be some interactional flexibility in how they delivered their services, despite being regulated by the OSHS. Rhianna suggested working with tenants was not about being:

so rigid and you must do this and you mustn't do that ... people don't change or grow or break their bad habits ... [when your approach is] you've done this wrong, you are out. How about we look at why you are doing this wrong and is there some way we can stop that happening?

This approach of building capacities and human capital with members of communities appeared to be a key driver of many regional organisations and the foci of those respondents' professional practice within those organisations. Respondents' accounts suggested these were often driven by a strong organisational culture where shared values and ethos governed institutional directives and respondents' intercultural professional practice.

The social housing field for metropolitan respondents seemed to be vastly different from those in regional settings. For example, most metropolitan respondents had limited engagement with Indigenous peoples outside the realm of providing housing services for them.

The siloed nature in which many metropolitan organisations operated also presented specific challenges for respondents whose roles were characterised by huge caseloads, more clients than they could literally accommodate and expectations to manage both tenancies whilst providing support for tenants. In many of the large metropolitan organisations, respondents' accounts suggested the organisational culture appears fragmented and weak. For example, many respondents fulfilled their roles in a relatively autonomous manner, relying mainly on their subjective values and norms to guide how they delivered services to Indigenous peoples. As Tina suggested, 'I don't have any real set policy that I follow, I just take it as it comes'. Whilst organisations had clear procedural guidelines, the sharing of service providers' norms and values to create a collective organisational practice ethos was largely missing in metropolitan settings. Tina went on to state, 'I don't think our policies and procedures ... reflect any culture'. Arguably, they do.

The following sections demonstrate how many respondents' accounts reflected Euro-Australian white normative cultural standards. The data suggested professional practice was scrutinised through an assemblage of Euro-Australian perceptions, values and etiquette. For example, many respondents were perplexed as to why Indigenous tenants risk their tenancies by hosting families and kin for indefinite periods of time. They suggested that it was more important for Indigenous tenants to have secure housing rather than meet their cultural obligations. While some respondents empathised with Indigenous tenants negotiating the divide between mainstream housing regulations and Indigenous cultural responsibilities, majority of the respondents were compelled to reinforce the power of policy and institutional standards to ensure Indigenous tenants conform to the hegemonic cultural values inherent within the field of social housing. Additionally, these fields 'reinforce patterned relations of power within which [service providers and] ... institutions utilise their capital to control and possess the resources at stake in the field' (Walter, 2010: 48). Across and within fields, in terms of race capital, Euro-Australian whiteness 'commands the highest value ... for facilitating or inhibiting acquisition of resources' (Walter, 2010: 48). As Horvst and Antonia (1999, cited in Perry, 2012: 93) contend service providers from Indigenous and cultural minority backgrounds may 'make tremendous social and cultural sacrifices in exchange for the organizational benefits they seek'. For example, imposing restrictions and punitive measures to ensure Indigenous tenants conformed to mainstream tenancy agreements presented social and cultural conflicts for some respondents. Potentially, when respondents' professional practice required them to enforce white cultural values and expectations, they

became part of the process that legitimates white culture and reinforced its power at the expense of meeting Indigenous tenants' cultural needs within tenancy management. Gail reflected on how she worked in the space between understanding cultural needs and dealing with policy requirements in the following terms:

It is a major factor [crowding] ... but I'm Indigenous myself and so it is just a way of life for me to see you know x amount of people in one house ... in my upbringing I don't see it as overcrowding ... I see it as me and my mum, my auntie, my cousins all in one house that's just the way we grow up.

Gail also suggested:

when you first come into the Department you are very driven by policy and you're trained that this is it. There is no grey, it is black and white and if it is not in policy it doesn't happen. So you are trained that way ... it is how it is drilled into you ... but you can't ... not with the clients we deal with and not in the industry we're in, you can't just go by policy ... you have to be able to see the grey and you have to be able to bend it.

Such comments indicate being 'able to bend' was becoming progressively more difficult to do within the punitive constraint of mainstream housing policies. And Gail explained further it was heavily dependent upon:

the makeup of the staff and what experience they have ... not only their personal life experience but their work experience as well within housing ... some housing service centres I don't want to say that they won't care about the cultural factor but they have got their blinkers on and it's just all policy.

Gail acknowledged that generally mainstream housing policy directives were inconsistent with her experiential understandings of Indigenous cultural practices and norms, however in her professional capacity she appeared to set these differences aside. Her pragmatic approach was evident when she stated, 'I mean if I couldn't accept it I wouldn't be here [in the social housing sector] for 13 years'. This quote highlighted how she accepted the institutional parameters of the social housing industry and her specific organisation. She indicated throughout her interview narrative that her primary focus was to help provide, what she perceived was the 'one need [of Indigenous clients] and that is a roof over their head'.

It is within these multidimensional contexts that respondents reported they were expected to be proficient within all aspects of the field's regulatory requirements and administration tasks. The following sections illustrate the assorted tasks that respondents identified as part of the demands of their professional practice. The first table (see Table 5-2) characterises the face-to-face tasks identified by respondents that they undertook at the frontline of service delivery with prospective tenants, tenants and stakeholders.

**Table 5-2: Direct service delivery tasks identified by respondents**

Face to face interactions with prospective tenants	Face to face interactions with tenants	Interactional tasks with real estate agents/owners/tribunals	Intra/inter professional interactions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Allocations</li> <li>• Signing up lease agreements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Routine inspections</li> <li>• Addressing property damage and maintenance issues</li> <li>• Addressing anti-social behaviour</li> <li>• Rent reviews</li> <li>• Locating and linking tenants in with additional resources and support</li> <li>• Providing outreach support</li> <li>• Conducting case plans</li> <li>• Tenancy advocacy</li> <li>• Evicting tenants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mediate tensions between tenants/owners and agents</li> <li>• Present evidence at Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (QCAT) when actioning a warrant of possession</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inter-agency collaboration with culturally-specific support workers, i.e. social workers, case managers, health professionals and other stakeholders</li> <li>• Intra-agency meetings to determine allocation of properties</li> <li>• Regular supervisory meetings</li> </ul>

At the staff client interface, respondents conducted interviews with homeless clients to determine their level of need and suitability for specific tenure types. Whilst most respondents utilised a standardised form to assess potential tenants' suitability, deep considerations were also given to whether they 'fitted' the tenancy mix within complexes, unit blocks and/or neighbourhoods. Noreen's quote exemplifies the importance tenancy mix was for her in keeping complexes peaceful. She explained:

usually when you put an Indigenous person in a property there is nearly always, and I'm not trying to categorise but there's nearly always alcohol related

problems ... or drug related problems ... And often that is quite a problem because the other thing is often drinking is in groups ... and that creates lot of problems for the complex ... sometimes ... it is a very intimidating for other tenants who especially if they've got to walk past to share their facilities like kitchens and laundries ... very intimidating to see a group of drunk people ... let alone Indigenous people that ... may have been sitting around for hours so ... certainly if I've already got ... somebody who's there that is a large drinker ... you would never ... put two of those tenancies next to each other.

There were various reasons why respondents paid attention to tenancy mix, including past experiences of 'things going horribly wrong' (Meredith) and the inevitable fallout for, not just the tenant, but other tenants, service providers, organisations and external and partnering agencies. As Hannah explained:

some actions can put people back to square one ... and to me that is heart wrenching not just for the tenant, the person ... but also for all the people that have worked so hard to get them to that safe place ... I take into consideration ... the investment that a whole lot of agencies have put into supporting this person.

Face-to-face interactions with tenants were characterised by numerous administrative tasks including completing tenancy agreements, addressing rent arrears, linking tenants with support agencies and workers and advocating for tenants where necessary. Respondents resolved conflicts between neighbours, and addressed neighbourhood fatigue. Lauren suggested, 'disputes are just constant ... I spend most of my day just getting phone calls from my tenants ... about their neighbours slamming their doors or how people are not taking their bins out'. For Vanessa:

if someone has called you up and says this tenant has done this ... and that we also have to be careful that ... they are just not complaining because they just don't like the person ... They're making something up ... So there could be spurious claims and you have got to be careful, you need to be able to confirm ... Where's your evidence that this actually took place? So that takes a lot of time as well ... you need to be able to ... substantiate their claims ... so there's a bit of investigation that needs to go on ... with those third parties and then you need to



put that to your tenant and see if it aligns with, if there is some truth to it. And sometimes you will never know the truth.

Some respondents were required to also negotiate tensions between tenants, real estate agents and/or owners and maintenance workers. This presented a specific set of challenges, as Lynne explained:

I do the head lease ... you've got to tie it all in ... It's a big thing to tie in ... And some agents are pricks ... absolute arse holes ... and just dealing with maintenance ... just a nightmare, there's just so many things so many baskets you are dealing with.

Meredith described her experiences, managing head lease properties from real estates and private owners as 'really, really ... difficult to manage because you have got all these other parties. You got ... maybe an owner, real estate ... the tenant, [the organisation] ... all trying to ... get along. She further explained the context in which a former colleague negotiated the program and the implications this had for her current role:

what happened in the past ... people didn't want to rent to black fellas, so he ... was desperate and he'd take whatever he could get his hand on ... some of those properties were you know not maintain ... and in poor condition ... So I've been working ... particularly in the last probably two or three years to replace that stock to hand it back ... and replace ... with contemporary ... modern housing ... good solid homes ... because ... some of these homes ... were just falling down ... really, really bad ... the paints falling down and it's going into the kids cereal, their breakfast ... I think ... historically ... we've had a problem ... accessing the private market ... for Indigenous clients.

Table 5-3 depicts the main facets, including administrative expectation of managing properties, managing tenants and organisational requirements, that were identified by respondents that shaped their experiences of professional practice within the field.

**Table 5-3: Desktop tasks identified by respondents**

Property Management	Tenancy Management	Institutional Requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fill vacancies</li> <li>• Complete Condition Reports</li> <li>• Enter Report Photographs</li> <li>• Manage repairs and maintenance</li> <li>• Check TICA listing</li> <li>• Procure new properties</li> <li>• Issue breach notices to agents and owners if maintenance issues are not resolved within stated timeframe</li> <li>• Apply for a warrant of possession through QCAT.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managing rental arrears</li> <li>• Implementing payment plans</li> <li>• Actioning remedy breach notices</li> <li>• Evict tenants</li> <li>• Writing support letters to services on tenants' behalf</li> <li>• Procure DoH tenures for tenants wanting long-term accommodation</li> <li>• Enforcing RTA guidelines</li> <li>• Notifying tenants of changing position on DoH wait list</li> <li>• Mediate neighbour complaints and resolving disputes</li> <li>• Investigating the validity of neighbour complaints</li> <li>• Address neighbourhood fatigue</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)</li> <li>• Prepare weekly, monthly and annual reports</li> <li>• Report statistics and all relevant documentation for allocations, tenancy agreements and breaches</li> <li>• Access Centrelink for rental payment information</li> <li>• Prepare reports for team and supervisory meetings</li> <li>• Respond and send emails to tenants and stakeholders</li> <li>• Mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse/neglect</li> <li>• Procuring private rental accommodation for head lease programs</li> <li>• Negotiate with agents and owners to address maintenance issues</li> <li>• Negotiate with tradespeople to address repair issues</li> </ul>

TICA: Tenancy Information Centre Australia

Sitting alongside these administrative tasks that service providers were required to perform, respondents, across social housing fields, identified to varying degrees the emotional challenges of interacting with and managing Indigenous tenants. For Lauren:

it is very draining ... when I first started ... I loved it ... because ... in my previous job for ... three and a half years ... it was just the same day in day out ... so this was ... challenging ... there was never a dull moment, there was always something happening ... I was enjoying that at the start but now it gets to the point where it's kind of draining, hearing people's ... stories ... can be emotionally ... hard sometimes ... so I find that pretty hard, I am finding it harder than previously ... I think because I have been here for a while ... I have built

that rapport and they know me more and I am hearing more of the stuff ... I couldn't see myself doing this for ... a career.

Ruby identified how the changes within the field created significant distress for her:

for me when I first started in this sector back in 2001 certainly there ... seemed to be much greater ease ... being able to allocate properties to people who were, in those days, considered having a priority for housing ... but ... with the increase in housing costs ... and the need for that affordable housing ... spiralling out of control, it's much harder and it's actually made my job less enjoyable because before ... people were able to access other housing products far more than what they are now ... so now ... for me is where a lot of my enjoyment's actually gone ... because ... there's so many very deserving people out there and ... such little housing stock ... It's really it's quite stressful at times ... you go home not feeling, not that you feel like you have made a bad choice, but you just wish you had more choices that you could make ... because you know that ... families or individuals who really, really need an affordable place to stay, you haven't been able to provide that to them today.

These narratives underscore some of the emotional challenges in many respondents' professional roles and daily practice. The following table presents the additional challenges that respondents identified as emotionally demanding within their delivery of services for and with Indigenous peoples.

**Table 5-4: Service challenges identified by respondents**

Interpersonal interactions with tenants	Inter/Intra-agency interactions	Policing disputes-surveillance and decision making
<i>Negotiating and developing rapport with tenants that are often:</i>	<i>Inter-agency interactions:</i>	<i>Policing disputes:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unresponsive</li> <li>• Displaying anti-social behaviour</li> <li>• Aggressive</li> <li>• Mentally unwell</li> <li>• Affected by drugs and alcohol</li> <li>• Victims of family and /or partner violence</li> <li>• Socially and economically disadvantaged</li> <li>• Living in unhygienic and unsafe environments that damages property</li> <li>• Adhering to cultural norms and practices despite risking tenancies</li> <li>• Complaining about properties and requesting to be relocated</li> <li>• Re-adjusting after experiences of incarceration in either correctional or psychiatric institutions</li> <li>• Non-communicative and refusing to take responsibility for properties</li> <li>• Physically and/or intellectual disabled</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accountable to, and constrained by organisational policy and procedures that have limited differentiation and flexibility to adapt to cultural difference</li> <li>• Challenges with colleagues determined as inexperience and lacking compassion for tenants' situations</li> </ul> <i>Intra-agency interactions:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negotiating support for tenants experiencing mental illness and drug and alcohol dependency</li> <li>• Establishing rapport with social workers and case managers</li> <li>• Negotiating and developing rapport with real estate agents, property owners and maintenance contractors</li> <li>• Addressing issues of maintenance and repairs with agents and owners</li> <li>• Negotiating with Centrelink and other government departments on behalf of tenants</li> <li>• Determining whether other housing options and services are necessary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mediating neighbour/ neighbourhood disputes-via phone or face-to-face if warranted</li> <li>• Investigating the validity of complaints and tensions</li> </ul> <i>Surveillance:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attending social functions to acquire information about tenants-need to know the issues affecting tenants to effectively link them in with support</li> <li>• Property inspections</li> <li>• Addressing unauthorised occupancy-either through succession of tenancy or prolonged visits from extended family</li> </ul> <i>Decision making:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choosing person to fit with neighbourhood-determine tenancy mix</li> <li>• Assess people against each other to determine highest needs</li> <li>• Exist tenants because of duration of programs, i.e. transitional short-term accommodation</li> <li>• Sending Remedy of Breach notices</li> <li>• Evicting tenants</li> </ul>

The service challenges identified by respondents constructed a troubling account of the emotional challenges accompanying these service providers in their daily delivery of housing services to homeless and tenant populations. The demands placed on and felt by these respondents created an understanding that the social housing field is an increasingly difficult field to be working within.

The previous three tables illustrate the points of commonality identified and experienced by respondents within the social housing field. Collectively, respondents were required to manage their personal and emotional responses to Indigenous tenants, meet institutional

demands and expectations, whilst operating in policy environments that had limited differentiation and flexibility in the face of cultural difference. The extensive list of face-to-face, administrative, institutional and emotional demands asked of respondents in the performance of their daily roles as service providers, suggest the social housing field is fraught with conflicts and tension which could influence professional practice and shape interactions with Indigenous service users and tenants. These experiences were compounded by the ambiguity around respondents' professional identities, and the blurring of the boundaries between the requirements of their roles as housing officers and/or tenant support workers. According to respondents' accounts these ambiguities created a sense of uncertainty for them within the field of social housing and expectations around their professional practice.

#### 5.4 Managing blurred, confusing and contradictory professional boundaries and roles

Empirical research draws attention to the enduring ambiguity and contestation surrounding the notion of 'professionalism' within the housing field. Much of the sociological literature defines professions in the context of numerous attributes a collective occupational group acquires (Casey, 2008). These attributes include formal education and entry requirement to attain a specialist body of knowledge; autonomy and control over a specialised area of activity that have specific task complexities; together with professional service delivery regulated by a professional code of conduct (Casey & Allen, 2004). It is with these attributes in mind that urban sociologists have been critical of housing managers', 'collective endeavours to present themselves, as a profession' by contending that 'they are only required to possess and use generic knowledge and skills ... [and] common sense in their objective and rational application of bureaucratic rules and procedures' (Casey and Allen 2004: 396). Paradoxically, some housing researchers contend:

In housing management, professionalism is not defined in terms of the possession and application of professional knowledge unavailable to others. Rather, it is defined in terms of the ability to act within prescribed policies and procedures in an 'objective and rational' and 'fair and sensitive' way (Clapham et al., 2000: 73).

Most respondents, although their practice was not perceived within the context of this study as objective, navigated policies and procedures in one, or all the ways professionalism is

defined by Clapham et al. (2000). It was within the milieu of high caseloads and often conflictual encounters with Indigenous clients, together with constant pressures to make relatively autonomous choices and decisions, that respondents constructed their professional identity. Interestingly, how these were constructed and defined by respondents across social housing fields differed significantly. For instance, many service providers in regional organisations identified their professional role as either a tenancy support worker or a housing officer. In contrast, many within metropolitan settings described themselves as property or tenancy managers. The following exemplars provide accounts of how housing officers in metropolitan settings perceive their roles. As Noreen suggested her:

job is to look after the property ... my responsibility is to the property ... I cop a lot of abuse at times and I just say the same thing over and over, you know I understand your frustration but my job is to do my job properly, I have to follow RTA guidelines.

Vanessa echoed Noreen's sentiments, suggesting:

in our role it always comes back to ... that tenancy law, that tenancy law we've always got that ... framework within which to work, so that's all I always resort to is going back to ... that's what we are taught to do you know, is just go back to tenancy law.

Most of the respondents in this study were employed as housing officers, only three respondents were specifically employed as tenancy support workers. However, the way they understood their role and defined their position within the field differed significantly. For example, some of the respondents who defined themselves as property managers, their focus was predominantly task-oriented on the management and maintenance of properties and abiding by the tenancy law. The welfare of the tenants within these properties appeared to have been a concern, but not necessarily a primary one for these respondents. Managing properties, managing the tenancy mix, and meeting institutional requirements appeared to be prioritised over addressing the cultural needs of their tenants. For the majority claiming to be property managers, their narratives suggested that they fell into housing management: it was not an altruistic-motivated career choice. Their professional identities were primarily invested in the practical aspects of the job (Casey 2008).

For those respondents who were employed as housing officers but defined their role as a tenancy support worker, they appeared to have prioritised supporting tenants to maintain properties. Whilst they acknowledged the importance of meeting organisational requirements, the primary focus was to provide support and resources for the people they were working with. Hannah suggested:

to me ... it all comes back to social justice ... It's starting to make me cry, injustice for someone to be forced to live on the streets just because of their values ... It's wrong ... so that is where we have to be smarter and more creative to make that not happen ... not them, they're the ones that don't have the education, they're the ones that don't have the resources and the skills ... Sure responsibility, people thrive if they increase their level of capacity to have responsibility ... they need that ... some responsibility ... But you can't overload someone with responsibility they are just going to crash and burn.

As evidenced in Hannah's quote, many respondents who considered themselves as housing support workers articulated altruistic motives for working in the social housing sector, with many reflecting their primary motivation was to help people. These respondents actively chose the social housing field, as their role aligned with their aspirations to engage in socially worthwhile employment (Casey 2008). Whilst respondents identified either as a tenancy support worker or a property managers, majority of the respondents in this study recognised their role required them to put on both hats- as support workers and property managers-to fulfil the requirements and expectations of delivering social housing options for Indigenous homeless and tenant populations.

Despite the contested nature of professionalism within this milieu, all the respondents in this study displayed some of the attributes that construct sociological understandings of professionalism. For example, respondents exhibited autonomy and control over interpreting and negotiating policy and organisational objectives within their frontline interactions. As Gail proclaimed when addressing tenancy mix 'if the dynamics are going to change that much ... especially in unit blocks ... by putting ... a certain person in there we ... bend the policy to not put them in there ... skip over them and go to the next person'.

In addition, respondents implemented appropriate procedures whilst producing outputs compatible with performance criteria. However, much of the literature suggests housing

officers are not specifically trained or equipped with a specialist body of knowledge and therefore housing management cannot be considered a profession. The data suggests that while some respondents have specific training in social housing service provision, few respondents had formal or industry training about Indigenous cultural norms and practices. This is especially relevant as the empirical research speaks of the challenges housing workers face in delivering culturally responsive services for Indigenous clients. Culturally responsive training programs (CRTP) mostly include self-reflexive activities that encouraged service providers to develop an understanding of how their own cultural values, understandings and practices are socially constructed and therefore non-neutral, with the aim being to heightened awareness of personal biases and proclivities for stereotyping individuals (Grote, 2008). CRTP have been widely recommended as the means to equip service providers with the skills needed (COAG, 2009), and address the challenges of cultural difference at the interface of service delivery to Indigenous peoples.

For respondents in this study CRTP seemed to have little impact on their frontline practice. The dominant perception of the 20 respondents that had attended CRTP, was that the training did not provide them with skills and knowledge they needed to respond effectively to the cultural issues risking Indigenous tenancies (Proudfoot & Habibis, 2014). For those 11 respondents who had not received any culturally responsive training, some suggested training ‘would not hurt’ (Meredith), whilst others believed they did not need to be trained to work with Indigenous peoples. Many respondents, particularly in metropolitan settings, believed it was not services, but Indigenous people that needed to change to fit the demands of tenancy agreements. These beliefs highlight the implicit power of white neoliberal ideologies to shape how respondents navigate the gulf between mainstream service provision and Indigenous cultural mores and norms. Indigenous cultural needs and practices are rarely legitimated as a justification that threaten tenancy stability (Proudfoot & Habibis, 2014). Managing Indigenous tenancies was often seen as problematic for respondents of my study. Many stated they were ill-equipped to deal with the complexities of the disadvantage experienced by most Indigenous tenants they provided services for. The following section looks at how the policies regulating Queensland’s social housing sector created further barriers and demands for respondents at the interface of service delivery.



## 5.5 Negotiating the cultural gap between mainstream policies and the habitus of Indigenous tenants

In Queensland, social housing tenants are subject to the Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008 regulated by the Residential Tenancies Authority (RTA), a Queensland statutory body (Nash, 2016). When respondents utilised the standard RTA tenant agreement to secure tenancies, ‘tenants are required to conform to mainstream behavioural standards in areas such as day-to-day living, financial management, property maintenance and compliance with the residential tenancy agreement’ (Nash, 2016: 10). Service providers are therefore required to ensure tenants are conforming with RTA requirements, which involved making sure they pay the rent, maintain their properties and advise respondents of periods of absence, just to name a few of the requirements. Where necessary, respondents were expected to implement surveillance and/or punitive strategies to deal with tenants that were not conforming and help prevent tenancy failure. Balancing the policy and organisational requirements with, and often against, the cultural needs of Indigenous tenants was a reported additional demand by respondents.

Many service providers in this study, were acutely aware that if Indigenous tenants were evicted from social housing the consequences could be dire. For example, an evicted tenant may need to demonstrate six to twelve months of good rental behaviour before they are eligible for social housing again. Additionally, if tenants are evicted from social housing and are listed on TICA, the rental history database, they may struggle to be housed in the period they are ineligible for social housing, becoming more vulnerable to homelessness (Nash, 2016). If families become homeless then children are likely to be removed from families creating more trauma and disadvantage for Indigenous peoples. Understandably service providers displayed a cautionary approach to these decisions, as Tricia explained:

we have people come in here and say I have to get a house because the Department is right on my case, once the children are removed from them it becomes a whole new kaleidoscope of issues ... That woman usually goes into depression ... that family then haven’t got a high need because they’ve got no kids ... It is the biggest cycle ... the children are removed for the children’s safety but it turns that woman on a tailspin usually ... and ... so it’s not just looking for housing, looking for housing hasn’t got high needs because she hasn’t got a child, then they do blood test or alcohol tests to make sure she hasn’t got no

alcohol in their system, the children are in care ... it's a microscope of, once you open that door to the Department of Children Services then that person, that woman's life just goes spiralling to the gutter basically ... and it is very, very hard for them to actually dig out of the situation because usually there is a reason why they became homeless in the first place and it may have been domestic violence, it may have been a drug, maybe gambling problem you know all of those simple things may be the reason why they are falling out of housing.

Most respondents were cautious in how they responded to the ASB policy measures, introduced by the Queensland Government in July 2013. The policy was implemented to reduce incidents of disruptive behaviour by public housing tenants and to decrease damage (deliberate or reckless), and/or illegal activities (DHPW, 2013). The DPHW set a strike-based process to deal with ASB. The policy defines ASB as minor, for example, when the noise from a party is excessive; ABS are defined as serious with behaviours that involve harassing a neighbour; and dangerous which include behaviours such as drug trafficking or physical assault (Nash, 2016). Any of these behaviours can require service providers to issue tenants with a written Strike Notice as well as a Notice to Remedy Breach. If a tenant receives three minor strikes or a serious strike in 12 months, they have the potential to be evicted. The demands of mainstream housing policies and in many cases organisational procedures created inflexibility and additional barriers for those respondents who were motivated to provide culturally responsive services for Indigenous tenants.

## 5.6 Conclusion

This chapter, through adopting Bourdieu's concept of fields of practice, explored the components of the field of social housing and revealed the struggles respondents have in managing the myriad of professional expectations placed upon them. Seen through the eyes of respondents, their roles as social housing service providers were burdened with exhausting demands from various arenas. Addressing the significant and competing demands of their tenants, colleagues, external stakeholders, together with fulfilling organisational requirements and mainstream housing policy objectives, placed substantial stressors on most respondents' daily experience of the social housing field. For many their abilities to draw upon the capital available to them, be it institutional, educational and/or their race capital, allowed for some relief from the relentless pressures in fulfilling their roles.

Conversely, for other respondents, often these pressures were amplified by the limited capital available to them. For example, respondents with little training and experience within the social housing field, suggested that meeting all the demands of service provision was unachievable, which often culminated in their choice to focus, primarily on the management of properties, rather than supporting tenants. This was particularly evident for those respondents that had little engagement with Indigenous peoples outside the realm of service provision.

The face to face work together with the administrative, institutional and emotional demands asked of respondents in the performance of their daily roles as service providers, suggests the social housing field was a difficult terrain for respondents to navigate and negotiate the best housing outcomes for their tenant populations. Respondent's accounts point to differing levels of flexibility within ICHOs, CHOs and SHOs, in their interactions to negotiate the dissonance between housing policy objectives and Indigenous cultural obligations. However, all organisations are governed, in varying degrees, by the OSHS that makes delivering culturally responsive services a notable challenge for the respondents of this study.

Adding to these difficulties, were policy and organisational expectations that respondents had the capacity to cope with the blurring of their professional boundaries and what this meant for their practice. The blurring of boundaries was evidenced in the demands to manage properties, manage people and engage in what, respondents perceived as social work practice. Respondents were required to identify the psycho-social needs of their tenants and link them with appropriate support workers and agencies, which further adds to the enduring ambiguities around their professional identities and created uncertainty and tension within their interactions. The social housing field required respondents to work in the 'space between' mainstream housing policy directives, organisation and professional requirements to meet the needs of their tenants. It was within this milieu that respondents experienced service delivery to Indigenous clients and constructed understandings of cultural difference.

The following chapter introduces the first of three chapters exploring how the continuum of racial understandings of difference along which respondents' understanding of their own racial identity, and the significance of cultural difference (or sameness) to their professional practice was identified.

## **6 They live differently to us**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The chapter starts by introducing the categories that emerged as a result of applying each component of the labyrinth of racial subjectivities and professional practice, to analyse the interview transcripts. Analysis of the data resulted in the identification of a continuum of racial understandings of difference along which respondents' understanding of their own racial identity, and the significance of cultural difference (or sameness) to their professional practice was identified. The analysis suggested there were three ways in which respondents understood cultural difference; hierarchy, homogeneity and heterogeneity, and these racial understandings were generated and applied by respondents when they engaged with Indigenous tenants. Each category reflects an amalgamation of respondents' epistemological, axiological and ontological standpoints that constructed understandings of difference between them and Indigenous service users, and point to the value and significance this had for the way they applied housing policy and practice and interact with Indigenous service users and tenants. Whilst each continuum category is discussed separately in the following chapters, respondents' standpoints comprise multidimensional understandings that often 'dipped' within and between categories. The intersection between each category emphasised the complexities evident in service providers' standpoints on the meanings of cultural differences and similarities. The focus of this chapter is to define the hierarchy category and introduce the respondents whose understandings formulated it.

### **6.2 Cultural understandings constructing the hierarchy category**

The hierarchy category reflects respondents' uncritical assumption that white Euro-Australian values, behaviours and aspirations are the cultural normative standard. Respondents' accounts of cultural difference were seen through a problematising lens in which white hegemonic values were applied to understanding of the Indigenous 'other' whose behaviours and values were often constructed as in opposition to white culture. This reflects a hierarchical approach to cultural difference which located white cultural ideologies as superior to Indigenous ones and often applied ideas of deficit and pejorative assumptions to the tensions and conflicts experienced in participants' management of Indigenous tenancies. These ideas were bolstered by a disregard for the importance of cultural values and mores for Indigenous peoples, with little consideration given to how cultural practices and obligations

presented unique challenges for Indigenous peoples accessing housing services and sustaining mainstream tenancy agreements.

Respondents' standpoints demonstrated how white ways of knowing and being inextricably constructed their understandings of cultural difference, with white western ways of knowing defining how respondents made sense of Australian society. Much of these knowledges were generated in the context of racial domination, that has its genesis in the colonisation of the Australian nation and its Indigenous peoples (Moreton-Robinson, 2004). It is through these colonised constructions of knowledge that dominant ways of knowing are embedded in Australian society and it is from this epistemological standpoint that respondents endeavoured to understand cultural difference. Indigenous knowledges were not acknowledged by respondents in the hierarchy category as legitimate and Indigenous peoples were not perceived as 'knowers'. Furthermore, these respondents presumed that Indigenous culture is a hindrance to Indigenous people's ability to contribute, in any form, to mainstream Australian society.

Respondents' axiological position became transparent through their assumptions that Indigenous clients needed to assimilate to white Australian values and behaviours, to free them from the despair and failure perceived to be inherent within Indigenous culture. These constructions effectively created the ideological divide of *us* and *them*. 'Us' comprises those belonging to the hegemonic culture where citizens contributed socially and economically to society, enhancing the nation's cultural identity and setting the normative standards for an individual to achieve a successful and meaningful life. By contrast, the category of 'them' consisted of those belonging to a culture that impedes Indigenous people's abilities to be productive citizens, with suggestions that they diminish societal resources and are a burden to the nation. Indigenous culture was determined by respondents as the primary contributor to Indigenous people's perceived lack of social, cultural and economic success.

Respondents' ontological positioning further shaped their perception of cultural difference. All respondents in this category were situated at the top of Australia's racial hierarchy and it is from this position that they disregarded the legitimacy and importance of Indigenous culture for Indigenous peoples. Moreover, there was no recognition that the inclusion of Indigenous cultures and Indigenous peoples within the broader society could add value to the collective Australian culture as well as national identity. Respondents' knowledge of Indigenous cultures was created predominantly through a lens of deficit and dystopia and this

was in stark opposition to respondents' understandings of white culture. For these respondents (see Table 6.1) white Euro-Australian cultural norms and values were perceived to have moral worth and cultural superiority over Indigenous cultural mores and values.

Unique to this category was the overt display of unchecked racism that respondents exhibited. Their standpoints were firmly situated in hierarchal understandings and their position and understandings rarely shifted between or 'dipped' within other continuum categories. Despite endless variation in respondents' subjectivities, sensibilities and experiences, all respondents in varying degrees, subscribed to strikingly similar ideas and understandings around cultural differences, especially in their comparisons between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures.

### 6.3 Respondents within the hierarchy category

The subjective and professional understandings of three male and five female respondents constructed the hierarchy category. All respondents were from Euro-Australian backgrounds, with two thirds of them having limited experience within the social housing field. Over half of the respondents worked within metropolitan CHOs, with half of the cohort managing caseloads of over 100 properties. Generally, those respondents in metropolitan settings managed fewer Indigenous tenancies than those in regional settings, however the absence of engagement with Indigenous peoples outside of tenancy management was remarkably similar across geographic settings. Two thirds of respondents had no experiences with Indigenous peoples outside the realm of service provision. Furthermore, less than half of respondents had previous experience of working in the field of social housing, with three respondents coming from the private real estate sector and two respondents with no previous experience within the housing industry (see Table 6-1).

**Table 6-1: Respondents' profile in the hierarchy category**

Gender	Cultural Background	Geographical Setting (n)	Types of Organisation (n)	Role in Orgs	Tenancies managed (n)	Current exp.(yrs) in the field	Respondents' (n) previous exp. in the housing sector
Male 3	Euro-Aust. 8	Metropolitan 5	CHO 8	Housing officer 7	Between 1-15 3	Between 1-2yrs 6	CHO 3
Female 5		Regional 3		Tenancy Support Worker 1	Between 100-130 4	Between 2-4yrs 2	Real Estate 3
					Between 160-180 1		None 2

All respondents within this category articulated that they generally felt ill-equipped to deal with the scope of disadvantage experienced by their Indigenous tenants. Their absence of training and limited engagement with Indigenous peoples potentially inhibited the way they delivered their services to Indigenous homeless and tenant populations. Despite the variances apparent in Table 6.1, respondents were collectively united in their perceptions that Indigenous culture is inherently problematic, especially in the context of social housing provision. Underpinning these assumptions were ideas of who deserves to be housed in a tight housing market. Lauren put forward experiences from her habitus to explain this point:

I am from a working-class family and we were not well off ... a single parent background, dad worked constantly ... we were brought up that we worked for what we earned and the majority of our tenants are on Centrelink and I find it really hard when they complain ... about how hard it is for them ... I find it really frustrating that they can't see what they have got and be thankful for it.

Lauren suggested in this quote that she found it frustrating when clients complained and these may not have been well received or potentially acted upon, due to her underpinning belief that clients needed to be thankful for what they had. In a similar tone, Ian drew attention to the ideas of deservedness in the following quote:

we look after the property not what's in the property ... and if they don't do what we say on the lease ... we offer them help and they refuse it ... there are people out there that, I had a lady who had a son going in for brain surgery having epileptic fits in the car ... they are the people that really want [help]... living in the car having epileptic seizures.

Underpinning Ian's narrative is the idea that Indigenous tenants were fortunate to be housed, because there are plenty of other deserving, more compliant homeless people to take their place in a diminishing rental market. This attitude was evidenced throughout respondents' explanations around managing Indigenous tenancies. They supported these ideas by conflating Indigenous culture with entrenched violence and substance abuse, neglectful parenting and bad tenancy behaviour within their narratives. Respondents' experiential understandings culminated in the supposition that Indigenous culture is morally devoid with no intrinsic value to Indigenous people or the broader society. Furthermore, respondents spoke of the good and bad Indigenous tenant and neglectful Indigenous parents to support ideas that 'they live differently from us' (Lynne). This pathologising of Indigeneity manifested in clearly distinguished socially and racially constructed binaries of *us* and *them* in respondents' narratives that often materialised in them describing discriminatory practice, as respondents admitted to 'not wanting to house Indigenous tenants' (Lynne).

## 6.4 The influence of habitus and race capital on understandings of cultural difference

Respondents' racial habitus encompassed their individual life experiences, worldviews and social positioning making them subjective by nature. Nonetheless, there were significant commonalities threaded throughout the collective habitus of respondents' racial understandings in the hierarchy category, offering profound insights. Respondents all belonged to the dominant racial order which situates them on top of Australia's racial hierarchy. Their habitus was developed and supported by the values inherent in white-settler culture and hegemonic epistemologies and became apparent in their individualised and Eurocentric understandings around concepts of home, responsibility, parenting and success. Respondents' values created the universal, normative and relatively unexamined standards in which Indigenous cultural norms and practices were measured against and defined. This is a critical point in understanding how respondents constructed ideas of cultural difference. They rarely examined the values, mores and practices that help form their habitus as a way of understanding cultural differences, rather they utilised the alterity of Indigenous peoples and their cultures to define the differences. Respondents' habitus were congruent with and supported by hegemonic Euro-Australian cultural norms and it was from this position of cultural normativity that Indigenous cultural mores, and practices were judged and found to be in opposition to respondents' white cultural expectations and standards.



Outside the realm of service provision, most respondents in this category had no experiential knowing of Indigenous peoples and their cultures, Lynne was the only exception. Lynne grew up with Indigenous neighbours, and although she had social experiences with Indigenous peoples these interactions did not appear to promote positive regard of them. It seemed from what Lynne said these experiences contributed to the many pejorative assumptions she held. To explore the nature of Lynne's understandings it was especially important to contextualise them within her subjective and professional experiences. Lynne, who was a mother in her mid-thirties, grew up in a public housing estate in an Australian capital city. She had been working for a metropolitan CHO for around four years. In sharing her story of experiences with Indigenous neighbours, Lynne clearly distinguished her family as different from the Indigenous residents within the public housing milieu, by claiming:

we were brought up ... you know dad looked after the property ... it was different ... It was clean, it was immaculate ... but some of the people thrown in were those types that I am dealing with now... so therefore I knew those types of people ... those people that were living in the Department of Housing properties.

Here Lynne offered a glimpse into her habitus, and the familial standards that, in part, constructed her expectations on how to maintain a property. Any perceived deviation from these standards, affirmed her construction and problematising of 'those type of people'. When asked what her biggest challenges were working with Indigenous tenants, she replied, 'it's the states of the properties ... like how they look after the properties ... that's the hardest I think'.

For the other participants who had no personal experiences with Indigenous peoples, their narratives were also rife with negative assumptions about Indigenous peoples and their cultural practices. These undesirable narratives, created largely by subjective understandings together with professional interactions and the absence of positive personal experiences, painted Indigenous cultural practices and behaviours as problematic to the management of Indigenous tenancies.

Within the social housing field, respondents' race capital enhanced their abilities to interpret mainstream housing policy and to implement institutional procedures, however their race capital also inhibited their interactions with Indigenous tenants. Respondents' race capital was defined as an intrinsic racial resource that was constituted through identification with,

and/or membership within communities, together with implicit and/or explicit knowledge of culture practices and mores. Mainstream housing policies, institutional procedures and tenancy agreements reflected, or are congruent, with respondents' understandings and white values, and potentially this made it easier for service providers in this category to enforce them. It can be argued their race capital allowed them to navigate the white expectations and requirements of the social housing field with relative ease, however their narratives suggested it inhibited their ability to communicate and engage effectively with Indigenous service users and tenants. It is within these constraints, together with participants' limited understandings of cultural norms and behaviours that they constructed problematised notions of managing Indigenous tenants.

## 6.5 They are different from us

This section highlights how respondents constructed pejorative ideas around the alterity of Indigenous tenants resulting in assumptions, including Indigenous tenants are 'not ready to live in our houses ... they are dependent on the system' (Lynne); 'they are ruled by alcohol' (Sean), and 'overtly racist and different from us' (Noreen). Critically the assumed *us* was not defined by respondents. However, the invisible white norms that respondents used to judge Indigenous peoples against, had significant consequences, as identified in a quote by Lynne:

I avoid housing a lot of Indigenous because I think they are not suited to our sort of housing at all from my experiences ... you know they could be next door to you and me ... I believe Indigenous should be housed in an area ... they can just lose control ... just do whatever they want in ... like a big complex that is obviously run by Indigenous ... they're the tenancy managers because obviously they can identify with them and they can just all mingle together.

Lynne presumed that 'our sort' of housing was 'not suited' to the Indigenous tenant population and Lynne's solution was to segregate Indigenous people from the non-Indigenous population with Indigenous managers noted as ideal to manage these tenancies. Lynne justified these assertions with assumptions that, 'they have grown up differently ... their standards are different I think'. Seen through Lynne's eyes, Indigenous tenancies were increasingly troublesome. Lynne managed the Community Rent Scheme (CRS) program, which provides transitional housing to eligible applicants. As a CRS provider, she procured private rentals from real estate agents and owners, and her organisation leased the properties

to eligible tenants. At the time of the interview her portfolio comprised 100 private rental tenancies. She described her job as ‘non-stop’ because she was dealing with real estate agents and the tenants. She argued:

you’ve got to be this sort of middle person that can relate to both ... and it is very important to balance, to bring that together ... that is really important in the CRS program ... you’ve got to tie it all in ... it is a big thing to tie in.

Based on her experiences within this program Lynne surmised that, ‘every Indigenous that we’ve had leave a property or had to evict, have left with thousands of dollars of debt ... in our style of housing’. Lynne advocated for, what I term as, ‘jail-esque’ style of housing, that would be ‘really strong durable ... concrete slabs [with] no glass’, as a reasonable solution to address the chasm between Indigenous housing needs and conventional social housing stock. These assertions can be described as discriminatory and pejorative, however for Lynne, she offered them as a solution to the many experiences of witnessing Indigenous tenants damaging property. Property damage not only cost her organisations thousands of dollars in repair bills, Lynne also identified how these issues potentially threatened the organisation’s reputation, as well as its ability to procure more properties.

Lynne’s reluctance to house Indigenous people in the private rental market was often explained through the prism of economic rationalism and risk management. Lynne’s priorities appeared to be about managing housing stock within the organisational budget, as she reasoned, ‘you are only funded a certain amount of money ... to fix up all the properties ... and ten thousand dollars in repair here, five there ... three there, it all adds up in a year’. Although Lynne believed she had insider knowledge and therefore a certain insight about Indigenous culture as a culmination of her childhood and professional experiences, she openly admitted that she did not feel equipped to deal with Indigenous people, and quickly reconciled this with, ‘I can only do the best I can’. Her race capital, this being her access to racialised understandings and resources, did not appear to afford her the necessary empathetic understandings or skills to positively engage with her Indigenous tenant population. Her interactional approach seemed to reflect the fears and the mistrust she exhibited when talking about her Indigenous tenant population. She said:

the young [Indigenous] females are hard to work with ... I think they have just got ... quite an aggressiveness about them ... that I wouldn’t cross ... I’d be wary

of ... the young females, the more encounters I have with them ... I'm just a bit  
.... intimidated by them I think.

These feelings of intimidation may partly explain Lynne's reluctance to house and deal with Indigenous peoples which manifested in the way she exercised discretion when addressing neighbour complaints. Lynne explained:

I haven't really investigated [neighbour complaint] because it hasn't gone too far but it is just about the same thing, they're drinking, they've people coming back all the time ... When the pay check comes in everyone knows ... the loudness, the parties ... I haven't dealt with this one yet ... because it hasn't got out of control ... Well I haven't been hearing any phone calls because if you hear like 20 phone calls coming in then ... I've just kind of left it ... because I have been so busy ... because it is not a real priority ... if it becomes a priority, if it becomes dangerous ... then I have to deal you know.

Lynne's interview indicates that the demands of her portfolio and her interactional approach, often meant that the interactions she had with her tenant population were punitive. Due in part to the pressures of her role, she rarely used precautionary measures to address Indigenous behaviours that were threatening tenancy sustainment. Lynne primarily dealt with tenancy issues when they became 'dangerous'. Lynne determined situations to be dangerous when tenants were drinking and having parties that were creating excessive noise, that led to many phone complaints, and potentially demonstrated neighbourhood fatigue. Her response to these problematic and therefore prioritised tenancy issues varied considerably from issuing remedy to breach notices and evictions; to applying to QCAT for a warrant of possession to rectify any potential property damage or outstanding tenancy debt. Lynne's responses point to her practice focus being largely driven by the management of properties rather than outcomes for Indigenous tenants. The following section highlights how respondent Neil created his ideas of *us* and *them* through perceptions that Indigenous peoples have different aspirations and goals than other Australians. Neil suggested:

The goals ... in the Caucasian family would be that I want to get a job. I want to get a good job I want to succeed, I want to have some money I want to go on a holiday I want to be able to give my family what they deserve. Where from an Aboriginal point of view or Torres Strait Islander or any Indigenous person it

would be ... I just want to have a place to stay, I want to have food in my belly ...  
I want to ... be linked in with my family ... I want to feel supported and I want to  
feel loved that's pretty much [it] ... It's ... more primitive ... it's very different.

By using the word 'primitive', Neil implied a host of pejorative assumptions about Indigenous peoples, their goals and aspirations. He inferred that Indigenous culture is stagnant within the primal functions of human survival. This was apparent in his assertion that Indigenous people want a home, they want food in their belly, they want to connect with their family and they want to feel loved. Conceivably, all these factors may be valid, however he assumed, Caucasian families have already attained a home, the food, the family connection and love. By suggesting 'it's very different' he implies Caucasian families have transcended to the next level of human survival evident in their aspirations for success, money and 'giving their family what they deserve.' Whilst, Neil did qualify this racially derogatory characterisation of Indigenous people, by admitting, 'it is obviously a gross generalisation', these ideas underscored his construction of cultural difference and, more importantly, his summation of the Indigenous tenant populations that he worked with.

It is important to place some situational context around Neil's hierarchical understanding. Neil was a young Euro-Australian man in his mid-twenties. At the time of the interview Neil worked three days a week for a regional CHO, providing transitional accommodation for individuals and families. He managed 12 properties and his main role was to help homeless families procure accommodation, providing them with one-on-one outreach support and linking them with agencies that offered counselling and/or financial help. In addition to these professional experiences, Neil had spent time on a remote Indigenous community. He said:

I've had a bit of experience in being able to ... work with people from an Indigenous background ... mostly Islanders ... so that's helped me a lot. I spent some time in an Aboriginal community out ... near Mount Isa ... I spent about a month out there which has also helped me. I guess[I] sort of understanding where they come from and their worldview ... and not just ... reading about Aboriginal people ... being able to experience it a little bit more ... that's helped me on a personal level.

Throughout his interview, Neil acknowledged the role of Indigenous cultural norms and practices in constructing Indigenous worldviews. However, this understanding was mostly

afforded to what he perceived as 'traditional-living Aborigines' and often was not extended to Indigenous tenant population he provided services for. Additionally, he believed his clients were caught up in the web of welfare mentality, as evidenced by the following quotes:

A lot of ... Aboriginal people in, especially my program ... they really know what they are entitled to and what they're not entitled to ... I've got a client that can get anything ... I don't know how she does it ... she gives me a run for my money sometimes ... trying to get support and stuff for her ... pretty much she can, if she needs a car she will go and get a car and she'll have it within a week. And it's insane how she works but she is just that clued in, she knows what she can get ... she's ... sort of engaged with services and she says she likes to milk the system ... I ... started to work with her about getting a job, getting some training behind her and things like that and she goes, it's not worth it, like if I get a full-time job I still earn less than what I get on Centrelink and looking at her payments she does ... Like she's got five kids, she is on a single parenting payment through Centrelink, Family Tax A and B as well as each kid she has she gets a certain allowance ... so she's earning ... I think we added it up around the 60k a year mark ... so she's just like well even if I did a uni degree ... most ... degrees you can't get paid that much and it's true ... I was just speechless after that (laughs).

He further explicated his point:

And since that client I have had another client ... she actually works for a major airline, she's a manager ... she came into our program through her daughter being ... pregnant and ... she had to leave her job because she is a single mum ... She took leave from there and wasn't being paid and ... she was struggling and they were looking at being primary homeless so that's where we picked them up and worked with them ... she is also Aboriginal and got a uni degree under her belt and she is ... highly educated and she has done quite well for herself ... she says that ... I make sure I don't earn ... over a certain amount ... because then I am not entitled to Department of Housing ... I can, if I wanted to, I can afford private rental but because of my heritage I am entitled to a Department of Housing property ... and I guess it's just that mentality.

Neil's narratives were littered with ideas of neoliberal measurements of success, however his dichotomous understandings of cultural differences were best captured in the following quote:

being Aboriginal in Australia is very different from being a Caucasian person in Australia, there's completely different moral values and they see the world in a different way ... I guess they are trying to link in with culture and being part of a world that is not their own.

Neil's summation emphasised how he conceived cultural difference within the realms of Indigenous morality and worldviews. Furthermore, his assertion that Indigenous peoples were 'trying to link in with culture and being part of a world that is not their own', highlighted Neil's empathy for Aboriginal people's marginalisation in the broader society, however this was underpinned by his racial and accurate assumptions that mainstream society is constructed through white-settler culture and hegemonic epistemologies. Most respondents did not demonstrate an ability to reflect on the impact of Indigenous marginalisation and how this would affect housing outcomes, rather they reduced it to simplistic understandings around the good and, predominantly, the bad Indigenous tenants to explain why some tenants fell out of housing.

### 6.5.1 The good and the bad Indigenous tenant

A good Indigenous tenant was identified by participants as one 'that spoke well ... was educated, and kept their house immaculate' (Lynne); and 'paid their rent ... didn't upset their neighbours and was responsible for their property' (Vanessa). In contrast, a bad tenant was deemed to live in 'chaotic, feral conditions, [sits] ... outside properties and drunkenly abuse[s] neighbours as well as property managers ... [and brings] traffic and noise to properties which often [leads] to damage and endless neighbourhood complaints' (Noreen). Rent arrears and property damage were associated with respondents' judgement around what constituted a bad tenant, however superseding these factors was the Indigenous cultural practice of accommodating visitors and families for indeterminate amounts of time. For many respondents, a tenant who was unable, or unwilling, to keep family members away from their homes was deemed a problem tenant. Extended visits from families were seen to be instrumental in creating disturbances and significant issues for respondents' management of Indigenous tenancies. In stark contrast, respondents determined a good tenant as one who followed the rules and separated themselves from their families. These polarised

constructions of the good and the bad Indigenous tenant go some way to highlighting the embedded nature of the tensions between respondents' individualist white understandings and Indigenous tenants' communitarian and cultural understandings around ideas and everyday experiences of 'home'. The solution for respondents was that Indigenous tenants had a simple choice, as Sean suggests:

You know every now and then you will have that person who will buck the trend, the kind that keeps to himself and succeeds. They want to surround themselves with their friends and family and the problems start with a large amount of people in a small space ... they need to choose whether they do the right thing by us or by their families.

By suggesting Indigenous people 'need to choose whether they do the right thing by us or by their families', Sean showed little understanding of the strength of Indigenous kinship ties and Indigenous principles of mutual reciprocity that made the 'choice' of 'doing the right thing by us' so difficult for many Indigenous people.

At the time of the interview Sean had been working for a regional CHO for 18 months. He was a young Euro-Australian male who was employed as a housing officer, providing outreach services to homeless Indigenous people. His portfolio comprised the management of between 160-180 tenancies. Prior to his current position, Sean worked for the private real estate sector, and had little, to no experiential understanding of, or exposure to Indigenous people. Much of his interview dialogue included white middle class notions of agency, culminating in ideologies and discourses of 'choice'. Sean believed much of his tenant population chose to be homeless. He asserted that Indigenous homeless peoples spent all their money on alcohol and chose to not do the 'right' thing by his organisation or DoH regulations. These beliefs are depicted in the following excerpt:

I have been privy to places where ... an elderly Indigenous gentleman ... and he was a good tenant, he's quiet and keeps to himself and yet I have seen his daughter in common area ... Indigenous ... telling him he is a white man's bitch ... because he was telling her to go away because she was drunk ... you know and he has got to face that challenge and it is up to him whether he ... does the right thing according to us or according to her.



Within Sean's cognisance of choice there appeared to be little consideration given to the enormity or implication this 'choice' may have had for the tenant. In this extract, he does not indicate insight into the gravity of expecting an elderly man to choose between potential homelessness, or the possibility of alienating his daughter. Sean did reflect on the situation later when he said:

the Indigenous seems to be that they don't want to be alone, they don't want to be lonely ... they have a tendency to reach out to family and friends ... and it creates a problem quite often ... The successful tenancies we have maintained ... the tenants have often decided to go out and visit their family rather than have them back to their unit or their house ... if they want family around, [they need to have] the right family round, so the right family can help them with the other family.

His solutions for Indigenous tenants, whose homeless friends were perceived to be risking their tenancies, was to:

not necessarily cut off the old social groups ... but make new friends ... if their friends all have housing, they are used to being housed, they are used to paying bills, they can manage their household that's the sort of things we want new tenants to surround themselves with ... You can't say to someone don't be friends with these people anymore ... they will still link in with their old friends, managing that is kind of where success comes from.

Alcohol dependency was seen by Sean to be instrumental in the homeless populations' ability, or in some cases apathy, to procure and sustain accommodation. He claimed:

There is a handful here ... that sit in the park and drink ... that's what they like, their friends come down and see them and they surround themselves at the drop in centre where they get two free meals a day ... So they can go and have a feed, back out to the park ... and they are happy to do that ... and they do that every day, then they'll go and visit friends, then they can go and ... sleep on a river bank or a bench ... there's no ties so those sort of people I doubt there is a way to help ... [but] the other ones, there is a group who are in limbo who want to do that, they want to be in the park, they want to drink they want to see their friends but they also want their own place ... and that's the middle that's the challenge...

it will take a bit of a cycle I think ... of being in accommodation and then out of accommodation to see both sides of it ... they can then make their choice of which sides they prefer.

Sean enforced measures that required Indigenous tenants to disregard their cultural obligations and responsibilities to maintain their tenancies. However, this imposition did not register in Sean's assumptions of why Indigenous homeless people were not sustaining their tenancies. He suggested more exposure to homelessness may help them make the choice of which side they prefer. In other words, conform or remain homeless- that, according to Sean, was a choice.

By applying a white individualised understanding, Sean's narrative indicates he neglected to consider the broader cultural, political, social and systemic determinants that contribute to many Indigenous people's occupation of public spaces, which in effect allowed these crucial factors to remain invisible and unexamined by him. By assuming that Indigenous people's circumstances were created by the choices they made, Sean displayed little understanding around the impact of colonisation, dispossession and disadvantage for Indigenous peoples and how these factors continue to influence their experiences of homelessness (Moran et al., 2016). The lack of context around Indigenous people's experiences was also seen in how respondents judge Indigenous tenants as bad parents, with some respondents suggesting that Indigenous children were being neglected.

### 6.5.2 Indigenous tenants neglect their children

Many respondents utilised strong moralising discourse when discussing Indigenous tenants who were parents. They conflated Indigenous culture with child neglect and suggested that Indigenous culture is detrimental to the wellbeing of Indigenous children. Lynne asserted, 'there is no chance for children', as 'they come from nothing' and the solution for her was 'they need to assimilate'. Within these racially discriminating assumptions, Lynne implied the only chance for Indigenous children was to become 'more white'. She used the following story to justify her position and inferred that formal investigations into neglect of white children are pursued more rigorously than issues of Indigenous child neglect. She asserted this is because of the historic residue left from experiences of the Stolen Generations, where children were unlawfully removed from their families. Lynne claimed:

I see three children running around in glass, but you can't do a report to Child Safety because Child Safety are really careful about taking Indigenous children away ... because of all the Stolen Generation so ... there's always conflicts there ... you've got to be really careful because that is how they live, but is that right for a child to be brought up like that? See there is a conflict there what's ... right or wrong ... because Indigenous we'll say we can't take them away but if a white child was running around like that in a house straight away there would be an investigation in to it.

Within this excerpt, Lynne implied that the trauma experienced by the Stolen Generations allowed Indigenous parents to 'get away' with child neglect, and this was unjust because 'white' people would automatically be scrutinised if their children were in the same scenario. Lynne's summary aligned with assumptions held by many respondents in the hierarchal category who perceived Indigenous children as vulnerable, due to what they judged as undesirable characteristics of Indigenous parents. Vanessa's narrative amplified white normative value judgements. She discussed the impacts these had for her tenant and his family:

I had a tenant who had three small children and there was no ... mother involved at the time and he was responsible for the care of these three children but on several occasions when I went to visit him ... this was very early in the morning, you know nine, nine thirty in the morning and ... I was already smelling alcohol on his breath and that was a bit of a concern to me ... the property ... it wasn't well looked after, it was quite chaotic ... it was very dirty and it was an unhygienic situation for the children ... [T]hree neighbours in that street ... had all called on several occasions to let me know that they were really quite concerned ... about the children [who] were out late at night roaming the street ... it didn't appear to me that they were complaining simply because you know there was some kind of discrimination or racial discrimination on their behalf. They were actually calling me up because they were extremely concerned about the welfare of the children. I got the sensation that everything was too much for him I think and it was. There was three children with a man with limited education ... clearly, maybe alcohol dependency because if he had alcohol on his breath at nine

o'clock in the morning...you can pretty much guess that that was the case ... so probably all those things were too much to deal with.

Vanessa determined that complaints by neighbours were motivated by extreme concern for the children's welfare rather than discriminatory attitudes towards the father. Constructed within her dialogue was a dysfunctional representation of this Indigenous family. Vanessa noted the absent mother, the drinking father, and the chaotic, dirty and unhygienic living conditions. By subsuming the complaints of neighbours, within the realm of morally concerned citizens protecting vulnerable, neglected Indigenous children, the father was co-constructed as amoral and apathetic in caring for his children. Vanessa conceded that her professional interactions with the Indigenous father were fraught with communication difficulties which made addressing the issues putting his tenancy at risk particularly challenging. She stated:

I did try and offer referrals to different support agencies ... culturally appropriate support agencies ... I'm not sure why but he wasn't very forthcoming either in wanting to talk to me ... or share anything that was happening and there was a lot of denial of anything that I put to him. When I went to inspect or just observed, what I could see there was a lot of denial.

Vanessa did not indicate how her visits that included inspections or observations may have explained, in part, why the tenant was not forthcoming in wanting to talk to her. The lack of communication presented specific challenges for Vanessa in being able to foster a 'good working relationship'. However, the implications for the tenant and his family were severe as the tenant and his children were eventually evicted from the property. Vanessa summed up the situation by sharing:

there was nothing more for us to do because the tenant was not cooperating with us ... I could not reach him I could not get a hold of him, to talk to him. I did try. I called around several different ... Indigenous agencies that I thought that perhaps could offer him alternate accommodation.

Although Vanessa indicated she sought alternate accommodation options for her tenant she explained that she was unable to help and that he eventually went to stay with his family. At the time of the interview Vanessa was employed within a metropolitan CHO as a housing officer. She had been in the role for 12 months and her portfolio comprised

just over 100 properties. She managed transitional accommodation for her tenancy population. She was a Euro-Australian woman in her early thirties, who had, by her own admission, very little experiential knowing of Indigenous people, their cultural norms and practices. Vanessa found it particularly difficult to access culturally specific supports for her tenants and acknowledged that she ‘would have benefitted a lot from having a bit more understanding and knowledge what the resources out there were’.

## 6.6 The effects of the social housing field on respondents’ intercultural interactions

Most respondents spoke of how the lack of access to culturally specific resources and/ or training and education hindered their capacity to provide support for Indigenous tenants. The paradox for many service providers, was that they were ‘not trained to be counsellors’ however they ‘needed to know tenants’ underlying issues’ to help link them in with appropriate support agencies. Noreen, who worked with a metropolitan CHO managing 110 tenancies, spoke of the multiple challenges around supporting tenants, potentially crossing professional boundaries and managing time constraints in the following quote:

there’s always been a little bit of ... conjecture about whether we as housing managers cross the line. We sort of get told things like you are not a support worker ... and I don’t have any support worker qualifications ... so it sort of implies that we are giving too much time to people ... I think probably ... having the time to spend on the person would be of great value and time is our enemy in this job because it is a large job with a large amount of tenancies.

Noreen suggested she was put in this position because ‘there’s not really any ... good support like you can ring up ... [that are] specific for ... looking after Indigenous or Torres Strait Islanders’. Vanessa also highlighted how it was ‘very hard to find appropriate services to be able to assist’. In contrast Sean and Jo who both worked for regional CHOs suggested there are ‘plenty of resources available’(Sean), maintaining that if they could not provide culturally specific support they would ‘certainly find somebody who could’(Jo).

The type of accommodation that respondents provided for tenants also had a significant impact on how they delivered housing services. Many respondents provided temporary transitional accommodation either in the form of a 13 week intensive support program for

families, or three-month short-term accommodation. Each of these tenure options had their own set of challenges for service providers. For example, Lynne emphasised the cyclic and paradoxical nature of the program that provided transitional accommodation for homeless peoples:

when they first sign up they're high or higher needs but if that drops within the period then we have to exit them into somewhere ... nothing may have changed ... it is just that they're housed ... and then they have to move out ... so they get housing then they have to move out because they drop with Department of Housing to a moderate need and ... we are then meant to be moving them out.

Lynne clearly struggled with the outcomes of a program that provided temporary accommodation for homeless peoples, and then by design perpetuated homelessness once tenants had been exited. As she explained:

if they drop from high needs to moderate needs they have to be evicted and they are not eligible [for that type of accommodation], that is really hard ... you are dealing with all these [issues] and like I said I beat myself a bit.

The seriousness of tenants being evicted from social housing was compounded by the difficulties that service providers identified in procuring private rentals for Indigenous tenants. Respondents noted how the process was plagued by many factors including structural forms of exclusion and discrimination as well as lack of affordable housing options for Indigenous homeless populations.

## 6.7 Indigenous tenants' exclusion from private rental markets

Many respondents offered insights about how real estate agents and owners displayed racist attitudes and prejudice towards Indigenous homeless peoples. They drew on experiences of agent and owners' inaction and unwillingness to offer accommodation for Indigenous clients. Sean drew on his previous experience of working at a real estate agency, claiming, 'the stereotypes [about Indigenous people] are alive and well'. He further explained the impact these stereotypes had for his clients, suggesting, 'we have got quite a number of tenants that would go well in private rental and just cannot get in'. He offered some explanation of the current housing market and demonstrated how this allowed agents to choose, because:

housing and rental market they are kind of spoiled for choice ... they don't have to give a unit to someone that is on benefits, or someone who is homeless ... they have the luxury of choosing someone who has got a long rental history and things like that.

Of concern for Indigenous homeless peoples is that real estate agents are not alone in enforcing exclusionary and discriminatory practices to avoid housing Indigenous peoples, as service providers in the hierarchy category also enacted these practices. Lynne suggested she deliberately avoided 'housing Indigenous people in private rentals' as a way of preventing them from residing within the broader community. This assertion indicates the power of Lynne's position in her field to shape homeless Indigenous people's housing outcomes. Additionally, it showcases how the uncontested and invisible nature of white privilege provided the platform for Lynne to unequivocally justify her discriminatory practice. She clarified her position by saying:

We are putting people in communities of home owners, people who have been renting long term you know they could be next door to you me anyone ... So they've got to respect and tenants have to learn respect like live within a community and that's why I believe some of the Indigenous aren't ready for that.

Lynne's dialogue drew on the notion of tenancy mix, which all respondents across the study cohort, suggested was an overriding factor in their decisions of who they allocated within specific types of accommodation.

## 6.8 The implications and importance of tenancy mix

According to respondents in this study, the notion of tenancy mix or who resides where, was agreed upon as one of the most critical factors in maintaining and sustaining successful tenancies. Respondents suggested that 'tenancy mix is something that is really important ... to keep complexes peaceful' (Noreen). One housing manager provided considered insight on how she used discretion for the 'sake' of the complex and those residing in it. Noreen explained:

I've got a drinker down the back an Indigenous drinker and an Indigenous drinker across that top section. If I got a referral, I had a vacancy in there and I saw it was an Indigenous person with a drug or alcohol problem I wouldn't put them there ... from a tenancy mix point of view ... and from a fatigue point of

view ... The complex is doing ok at the moment because I got rid of that guy [violent, alcoholic Indigenous man] and he was the most violent ... so even though there's a couple of drinkers there that's not going too bad at the moment ... so they have quite a lot of fatigue around that previous situation ... They've had enough they need some peace and quiet ... for a little while.

Often within high density complexes, respondents articulated an idea of complexes having personalities of their own, and tenants' personality were required to 'fit' the complex, especially if there were high levels of mental illness and alcohol and drug dependency amongst the tenant population. Unlike Lynne's suggestion of housing all Indigenous people together in one complex, many respondents offered stories to contest the assumption that this would be beneficial for Indigenous tenants or service providers. Sean maintained:

we found out the hard [way] ... what we try to do is maybe keep a maximum of two, three ... clients in the complex at one time ... separate them if possible so they don't have that connection, where they are right next door ... so they won't all gather in the one spot either.

Respondents use of discretionary power was apparent not only within the allocation process, it was also evident within their professional practice and the way they interacted with Indigenous homeless people and tenant populations.

## 6.9 Intercultural professional interactions and the use of discretionary power

In the context of this study, discretion is concerned with the extent of freedom housing officers can exercise within their frontline interactions, 'and the factors that give rise to this freedom within that context' (Hupe, 2013:433). Respondents within the hierarchy category were faced with inadequate resources to address increasing client demand. The organisational focus on administration tasks also meant that respondents often had limited time to spend with tenants. In addition, most respondents in this category had little training or experience within the social housing sector which meant they often lacked the personal resources to deal with the stressful nature of their work. Within these constraints respondents appeared to have some freedom from organisational authority and supervision.



However, the data suggests that respondents in the hierarchy category were reluctant to use discretionary power to mitigate the impact Indigenous cultural practices often had for sustaining mainstream tenancy agreements. There were few examples of respondents being lenient. They seemed to act when a tenant's situation strongly resonated on some level with respondents' own subjectivities and sensibilities. This was apparent in Sean's explanation of an Indigenous tenant who had just been employed:

I think it was a week or so and she was working got some money, she stopped going to work because the family had come over with alcohol ... they had a few drinks she had missed work ... and then that process did not end well ... her solution to that was to go her family's house ... and stay away from her unit ... the rest of her other side of the family they continued to use her unit ... She is the tenant she is responsible and we still haven't found that lady we know she is around but we haven't made contact with her ... the problem kept happening and we had no other choice but to terminate her tenancy ... even though we took her as a warrant of possession, I would look at housing her in the future if she's pay off her debt ... purely because it wasn't her that was creating the problem ... Like I say we will make allowances ... every now and again.

Sean displayed some empathy toward the tenant's situational circumstances and he identified that because she was trying to break away from her Indigenous families and work and improve her life chances he could make allowances. However, this use of discretion was not applied to those Indigenous tenants that fell out of housing through substance use or sharing their accommodation with other Indigenous homeless peoples. These tenants were shown little empathy, and at worse respondents' narratives resonated their impatience and often disdain for tenants' situational contexts, amounting to conflict and tensions being evident in their interactions with Indigenous tenants.

## 6.10 How race shapes intercultural interactions

Respondents' interactions with tenants indicated hierarchal positioning of racialised power, with service providers firmly positioned on the top of the hierarchy. Whilst there was diversity within respondents' interactional styles, the similarities were striking, especially in the context of their one-dimensional approach in resolving tenancy problems. For example, communication between respondents and tenants to address and/or resolve conflictual or

problematic tenancy issues were notably absent within respondents' accounts of their interactions. Often these issues were framed up as the Indigenous problem and the respondents as the non-Indigenous professional problem-solver.

Regardless of the situational context, respondents strictly enforced the regulations contained within the Residential Tenancy Act (RTA) and often suggested they had no other choice. What became apparent within the description of these interactions was that Indigenous tenants had little choice other than to abide by the rules and regulations that govern mainstream service delivery and respondents' enforcement of the rules. The multi-layered, complex nature of Indigenous cultural obligations and responsibilities to their extended families and kinship ties, were, in the main, not considered by respondents as legitimately warranting any mutual investigation on how to accommodate Indigenous cultural demands within the parameters of tenancy requirements. Therefore, the rules and regulations of tenancy agreements and organisational procedures assumed primacy over all other considerations, despite their potential cultural implications for Indigenous tenants. Most respondents, when addressing tenancy issues, interacted with the tenants via telephone conversations, or corresponded through text messages and formal breach notifications. Face to face contact was often limited to addressing property damage and evictions, with many respondents suggesting that they only had face-to-face contact with Indigenous tenants 'if they have to' (Sean). The full implications of respondents' choices, whether to enact discretionary power is compared across the categories on the continuum of racial understandings and discussed extensively in Chapter Nine.

### 6.11 Respondents' perceptions of culturally responsive training programs

An additional point of commonality within the hierarchy category was the observation that respondents had no formal or institutional training in how to deliver culturally responsive service provision for Indigenous tenants. Respondents' views on the potential advantages of training programs were varied, although most respondents indicated that it could be of some benefit to their intercultural practice with Indigenous tenants. Sean suggests that CRTP 'would have been really helpful when I first started to do something like that ... even now ... [after 18 months in the position] ... I would definitely do it'. Conversely, Lynne reasoned that the programs were not essential to her practice because; 'life experience can give you a load of knowledge ... [I] knew a lot about Indigenous, grew up surrounded by them .... I mean it is all good the theory side but then if you have been doing it for a long time you are

aware'. Many respondents, implied CRTP may be beneficial, however in the context of their demanding workloads, most perceived they did not have time to participate.

## 6.12 Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates how respondents in the hierarchy category problematised cultural difference. In their explorations of difference, respondents drew upon white hegemonic values and applied these understandings to the Indigenous 'other' whose behaviours and values were often constructed as in opposition to white culture. This involved a hierarchical approach to cultural difference which located white cultural ideologies as superior to Indigenous ones and often meant applying ideas of deficit and pejorative assumptions to Indigenous cultural behaviours and practices. Respondents drew from their habitus to explain how Indigenous peoples have different morals, aspirations and goals. Critical to this category, 'different' was implicitly and explicitly framed up as inferior to white normative values and predominately neoliberal aspirations. Generally, Indigenous tenants were not perceived by respondents to be valuable members of Australian society unless they were demonstrating a willingness to disregard cultural responsibilities and conform to more 'white' ways of being. These ideas were also the cornerstone of the respondents' assumptions about what constitutes a good and bad Indigenous tenant. Furthermore, their assumptions were bolstered by a disregard for the importance of cultural values and mores for Indigenous peoples, with little consideration given to how cultural practices and obligations present unique challenges for Indigenous peoples accessing mainstream housing services and their abilities to sustain tenancy agreements.

Respondents' subjective habitus and experiences within the social housing field formed the bedrock of their accounts of how they interacted with Indigenous service users and tenants. Respondents did not appear to draw upon institutional, education and/or race capital, and this partly explained how they constructed these accounts. In the main, interactions were constructed and shaped predominately by respondents' one-dimensional understandings, as it was through the lens of service provision that respondents articulated their knowledge of Indigenous people's cultural norms and practices. These experiential understandings appeared to have inhibited positive communication and engagement with Indigenous tenants. The pathologising of Indigenous culture by most respondents, effectively led to little value being placed on the legitimacy of Indigenous cultural norms and behaviours.

It follows that respondents rarely considered Indigenous cultural factors to understand why some tenants fell out of housing, and as most respondents had little cultural resources to draw upon, the role of culture in understanding issues ‘risking’ Indigenous tenancies was mostly overlooked and often dismissed. This is a critical point in relation to how respondents actioned their discretionary power when dealing with cultural issues affecting successful housing outcomes for Indigenous tenants. Generally, respondents were reluctant to deviate from the rules and regulations that governed their organisations. Their discretion appears to have been targeted at enforcing the rules of tenancy agreements rather than trying to mitigate the impact Indigenous tenants’ cultural norms and obligations often had on tenants’ ability to maintain successful tenancies.

Taken together, the commonalities and differences within respondents’ hierarchal understandings provided powerful insights into their everyday racialised practices at the interface of service provision. The unique element of this category is the distinction made between the invisible, normative un-racialised *us* and the visible racialised *them*. Chapter Seven introduces the findings from the homogeneity category on the continuum of racial understandings of difference and explores how respondents in the category understand cultural differences. It examines the potential impact these understandings have for service delivery and housing outcomes for Indigenous homeless and tenant populations.

## 7 We are all the same

### 7.1 Introduction

In stark contrast to the hierarchal understandings explored in Chapter Six, this chapter reveals how respondents' beliefs in egalitarianism, equal opportunities and sameness shaped understandings of cultural differences and constructed the homogeneity category on the continuum of racial understandings of difference. The homogeneity category features assumptions that *despite* cultural differences, collectively we are all the same, we belong to one race-the human race-therefore we all have equal opportunities to access society's distributional and material resources. Respondents were deeply motivated by a prodigious intent and desire to implement non-discriminatory practices and create a sense of equality within their interactions with Indigenous service users and tenants. However, the homogenisation of cultures culminated in respondents inadvertently overlooking the impact cultural differences has for Indigenous tenants competing for limited resources within the social housing sector. These homogenised understandings often neglected to account for Indigenous tenants' experience of inequity and marginalisation within service provision. Respondents rarely considered the unique challenges that cultural norms and obligations pose for Indigenous peoples accessing housing services and maintaining mainstream tenancy agreements. This creates the prism through which white culture asserts its dominance as respondents' belief in the existence of equal opportunities located the burden of responsibility squarely with Indigenous populations. Respondents' discourses neglected to recognise racial privilege or conversely, marginalisation, which determined Indigenous experiences of discrimination and exclusion as an individualised problem rather than a racialised and societal one. Data indicates that this individualisation of exclusion and discrimination also maintained the invisibility shrouding racial privilege.

Respondents' epistemological and axiological standpoints demonstrated how their understandings of cultural differences were inextricably shaped by white Euro-Australian knowledges, normative values and standards. Respondents, through ignoring cultural differences, unwittingly problematised these differences, in varying degrees, and determined they could be mitigated through applying an undifferentiated egalitarian approach when interacting with Indigenous clients. Moreover, respondents also ignored the power differential between themselves and clients at the frontline of service provision, suggesting

that respectful non-discriminatory practices created an interactional terrain where power was diminished. However, ideologies of respect and equality were framed within white neoliberal understandings that further encapsulated the power of white culture to remain invisible in respondents' understandings of cultural differences.

The majority of respondents in this category were situated at the top of Australia's racial hierarchy and it is from this ontological positioning that they mostly disregarded the legitimacy and importance of Indigenous culture for Indigenous peoples. Unique to this category was the overt belief that providing an undifferentiated one-size fits approach ensured that Indigenous peoples could have equal opportunities to access housing services and necessary resources.

Respondents' standpoints were situated in homogenised understandings, however at times some respondents' position and understandings 'dipped' within other continuum categories. For example, respondents, including Julie who worked with a metropolitan CHO, and Katrina and Maggie who worked in a regional CHO, drew on hierarchal understandings to demarcate the perceived difference between how Indigenous peoples live in their accommodation in comparison to other members of society. On the other hand, other respondents occasionally recognised the importance of cultural awareness and appreciating diversity within their interactions with Indigenous clients, which at times, ran counter to their narratives of sameness. Despite this and significant variation between respondents' subjectivities, sensibilities and experiences, all respondents in this category subscribed to remarkably similar ideas and understandings around cultural differences, with their predominant discourses underpinned by beliefs that difference could be mitigated through egalitarian interactions.

## 7.2 Profile of participants

The subjective and professional understandings of one male and eight female respondents constructed the homogeneity category. Seven respondents were from Euro-Australian backgrounds, and two respondents originated from New Zealand. Two thirds of the respondents worked within metropolitan CHOs, managing caseloads of over 100 properties. Generally, those respondents in regional settings managed fewer Indigenous tenancies than those in metropolitan settings. Two thirds of respondents either worked with Indigenous colleagues or had relationships with Indigenous peoples outside the realm of service

provision. Two thirds of respondents in this category had previous experience in the social housing field, and two respondents both had extensive experience in the social housing field in New Zealand. One third of respondents had no previous experience in the social housing industry (see Table 7-1).

**Table 7-1: respondents' profile in the homogeneity category**

Gender	Cultural Background	Geographical Setting (n)	Types of Organisation (n)	Role in Orgs	Tenancies managed (n)	Current exp.(yrs) in the field	Respondents' (n) previous exp. in the housing sector
Male 1	Euro-Aust. 7	Metropolitan 6	CHO 8	Housing officer 8	Between 10-30 3	Less than 1yr 1	CHO 3
Female 8	Cultural-minority 2	Regional 3	SHO 1	Senior Manager 1	Between 100-140 6	Between 1-2yrs 3	Real Estate 3
						Between 2-4yrs 4	None 3
						Over 10yrs 1	

Many respondents in this category displayed considerable difficulty identifying the role of their cultural background in shaping their professional interactions, which in turn created their distinct mono-cultural understandings of difference. Notions of egalitarianism, that largely strengthened respondents' sympathetic and empathetic responses to Indigenous tenants, did little to promote the exploration of how cultural differences created potential barriers for Indigenous people navigating the social housing system. Respondents intertwined ideologies of respect and egalitarianism to articulate how they interacted with Indigenous homeless and tenant populations. For example, when asked about the interplay between cultural differences and their professional practice, respondents claimed 'it doesn't matter what culture you are ... everyone should be treated equally the same' (Julie), with many respondents echoing Katrina's assertion that, 'we just make sure we treat everyone equally'. Julie maintained 'there should be no favouritism ... everyone has ... that equal opportunity ... to apply for that house over there ... and to be assessed fairly'.

The one-size fits all undifferentiated approach espoused by respondents was intrinsically problematic. Although the intention was to deliver the same housing services, regardless of cultural differences-which could suggest best practice-by inadvertently obscuring the importance of cultural norms and practices for Indigenous peoples and the conflicts these often raised for tenancy sustainment, respondents often placed responsibility for any problematic tenancy issue squarely with Indigenous tenants. These understandings and

practice ethos failed to consider the mix of complexities and ramifications that systematic inequalities posed for many Indigenous tenants in their abilities to secure and maintain successful mainstream housing outcomes.

The following quote illustrates the problem of sameness contained within these individualised assumptions. Julie claimed that, ‘it doesn’t matter what culture you are, if you present yourself well and speak well ... you fill out the application well ... you’ll get there ... you’ll get something’. Contained in this quote is the invisible normative standard that presumes Indigenous tenants had access to equal treatment, demonstrating the indelible power of hegemonic Euro-Australian cultural values and assumptions. In Julie’s quote the term ‘well’ promotes white normative Euro-Australian standards. The implicit assumption is that any deviation from presenting well, speaking well, filling out an application well, would result in people not getting something. For Julie if homeless people met these standards they would get something. At no point did Julie identify broader social forces that inhibit Indigenous peoples access to mainstream housing options. She mistakably dismissed the difficulties many Indigenous service users and tenants face through their experiences of marginalisation and alienation from housing services, and the mainstream society more generally. She located successful procurement of housing within the agency and capabilities of her tenant population. By doing so, Julie, as with all respondents in the homogeneity category, demonstrated her deeply held beliefs that all human beings have equal opportunity and equal access to distributional resources within the social housing sector.

### 7.3 Helping is the primary motivator for respondents in the homogeneity category

The common discourse threaded throughout the interview narratives of respondents in the homogeneity category was the deep desire and motivation to help their tenants. The management of properties appeared to be of secondary concern for these respondents, with their primary focus being on helping perspective tenants access properties and maintain their tenancy agreements. The following exemplars highlight the importance of ‘helping’ for respondents. Wendy, who at the time of the interview had been working with a regional CHO for 4 years, suggested:



you do get some satisfaction ... just housing people that you know are in need, looking after tenants knowing that they will actually listen to you ... and that you are able to just help people I guess ... I do like to do that.

Katrina, who at the time of the interview was also working in a regional CHO, reflected:

helping someone it is really exciting when you see someone get their first house ... they haven't had their own place or anything and then when they ... actually get offered the unit and they go and look at it and the way they walk around the house and oh I can do this or I can do that ... you know that kind of thing. I think ... that's really nice.

Both narratives demonstrated the real-life benefits for respondents in being able to make a potential difference in their tenants' lives. Katrina shared another experience that suggested what made her role as a housing officer more fulfilling:

We had to go and get this ... person from the river because he was elderly and he was walking into town, he had health issues and he was living out of the back of a truck out at the river so we had to bring him in and ... try and help him ... he has never had Centrelink before he has never had any form of pension or anything ... I was like how old are you and he was like 80 or something ... so he had always worked but his health had got to the stage where he was not able to ... He was just living off ... I don't know what, just nothing ... so the girls [within the organisation] helped him get ... his Centrelink and ... when he got his payment he was like 'Is this all mine? ... And we were like 'Yes mate it is' and, 'I get it every fortnight? 'Yes you do' ... but you know in this day and age you would never think there would still be someone like that ... to ... actually be part of getting him that, [help] getting to see doctors ... getting him on to the housing list and that kind of thing ... being part of that.

In retelling this story, it was clear to me that 'being part of that' and helping the elderly gentleman access the resources he was entitled to was profoundly important to Katrina. Rebekah, who at the time of the interview was working for a metropolitan CHO echoed similar sentiments. She explained that in her role:

I feel like I'm being helpful, in my previous job ... you're helpful but ... not with people that were really vulnerable ... I'm always shocked, I write a letter to the Department of Housing and move somebody back up to high needs and you're like, oh wow they don't have to leave, they are going to be ok ... and that kind of thing.

For most respondents helping their tenants was predominantly framed up as securing and meeting the material needs of their clients. In the main, Indigenous clients' cultural needs were largely unspoken; they rarely mentioned they had considered whether Indigenous tenants may also benefit from help in negotiating the demands between their cultural obligations and mainstream tenancy agreements. This oversight is a problem of providing undifferentiated mainstream housing services for Indigenous clients and tenants as it neglects to consider Indigenous people's habitus and overwhelmingly reflects the habitus of respondents.

## 7.4 The influence of habitus and race capital on understandings of cultural differences

Respondents' habitus, that comprised various life experiences, worldviews and social positioning, seems to have largely accounted for their understandings of cultural differences. Most respondents belonged to the dominant racial order which situates them on top of Australia's racial hierarchy. Two respondents in this category sat outside the top rung of Australia's racialised hierarchy, nevertheless they openly ascribed to the intrinsic values of white Euro-Australian settler culture and hegemonic epistemologies. For all the respondents, these values created the universal, normative and relatively unexamined standards that formed their notions of sameness. This is a vital point for understanding the invisibility of cultural differences for respondents in the homogeneity category. They rarely examined the values, mores and practices that helped form their habitus as a way of understanding cultural differences, rather they implicitly drew upon these to construct notions of sameness. Respondents' habitus were largely congruent with and supported by hegemonic Euro-Australian cultural norms and it is within this position of cultural normativity that understandings of cultural differences were often obscured. Furthermore, respondents drew upon their beliefs in egalitarianism principles and ideas of equity to describe how these shaped their professional practice with Indigenous tenants. For example, Paul stated:

I come from a background where ... certainly ... respecting the next person ... respecting the individual irrespective of ... where they might be from ... where we listened to ... not only your parents ... but you listen to your Aunties and Uncles ... and your older siblings ... and so that ... was ... just the way it was ... for me, that was the way it was geared up and I sort of have perhaps continued with those things outside the family ... I try to reach out on the same sort of level ... I am not superior to them.

Paul's quote indicates how his habitus and axiological position influenced his interactions with Indigenous tenants. This assertion that he was 'not superior to them' suggests the importance he placed on notions of equality. Of concern however, Paul overlooked the impact of his professional power on his interactions with Indigenous clients. By discounting the interactional power differential, Paul disregarded the reality of being a discerning provider of a scarce resource to his Indigenous clients who were often needy recipients. This form of power-evasiveness (Frankenberg, 1993), whilst potentially unintentional, maintained hierarchal interactions between Paul and Indigenous tenants. Denying the ubiquity of power within the field, potentially created further tensions and barriers at the interface between Paul and his Indigenous clients and tenants.

The following response by Julie, who at the time of the interview had been working for a metropolitan CHO for 10 months, demonstrates how her habitus guided and influenced her professional interactions. She explained:

I'm ... [from a] ... family of seven children ... sometimes we would be rude to each other, my mother used to say it is not what you say it is how you say it ... and I've kept that all my life ... I have always been taught by my mum ... if there's a problem just walk away, even if it is hard you know it doesn't mean you are a coward walking away. But I guess on the other hand as well not just the values that my parents have instilled in me as a child, a teenager and an adult but also the values that I have through church ... I think this is where the patience came from ... like when they're yelling I know they are not yelling at me I know they are yelling because the system is unfair or they didn't get what they want so I allow them to ... carry on ... when they are finished, when they calm down and I say to them have you finished yet, can I have a turn and then we'll sit down.

Some respondents were less insightful about the role their habitus played in shaping their professional interactions. This was particularly evident in Sue's claim that 'I think everyone's experiences and personalities and views ... I mean that's what makes you, you ... so it is going to affect how you deal with people ... but in terms of how, I find difficult to answer'. This quote suggests her challenge to explore how her habitus influenced her professional practice. This was reflected by Melinda also:

you can put your housing officer hat on but I think your values ... we are kind of shaped by our upbringing aren't we ... I know we have the big thing about Indigenous and non-Indigenous people but I actually see everyone as human beings so ... to me it doesn't ... it's not meaning to sound derogatory, but to me it is a skin colour ... I see the cultural differences, I find the cultural differences very interesting ... but they are not my personal beliefs.

Melinda's quote highlights conflicting standpoints. On the one hand, her statements demonstrate an homogenised understanding, and at the same time she remarked she saw cultural differences, presumably Indigenous cultural differences. Melinda's quote typifies how her position was indicative of 'dipping' between the homogeneity and heterogeneity categories on the continuum of racial understandings. Melinda finished her reflections by stating that, 'I just see it as service delivery to tell you the truth'. What may appear as unreflective practice by Melinda and respondents in the homogeneity category indicates that their organisations did not require them to reflect upon how their values and beliefs influenced and shaped their professional interactions with Indigenous tenants. For many respondents, they saw their role as ensuring that they helped Indigenous tenants access, what they perceived to be the necessary resources to maintain successful tenancy arrangements.

Julie perceived Indigenous tenants should not received special treatment through the Australian housing sector and drew cross-cultural comparisons between her understandings of Maori and white New Zealanders to argue:

why should the Indigenous culture be any... [more] ... special than the other person ... you know homeless needing a home ... in New Zealand with the Maoris, they always say it was their land ... but they don't get that sort of treatment ... they are treated equally the same as an ordinary white Kiwi ... you know everyone is treated equally the same, there weren't ... things just for the

Maoris or things just for the Pacific Islanders, or just things for the white Kiwis ... I thought why should ...[Indigenous people] ... receive any special treatment ... I have found there seems to be a lot of privileges for the Indigenous cultures here and yet I compare it back to the Maori people in New Zealand ... [they] ... don't get those.

At the time of the interview, Julie was relatively new to the Australian housing sector, however she was previously employed by the DoH in New Zealand for over a decade. Throughout the interview, she drew on her experiences in New Zealand to compare the inequality she perceived was occurring in the Australian housing sector. Cross-cultural homogeneity, was alluded to when she discussed Indigenous Australians, Maoris and Pacific Islanders as all being the same. She contended:

The Indigenous people are no different from the different cultures we have back home. You know we have the Maoris, we have the Pacific Islanders, you know we have the new comers that are going into the country ... I've had many years of dealing with people that are the way they are ... The only thing ... is that with here a lot of my tenants have mental health ... but I look at them and they are all unique you know.

Paradoxically, Julie homogenised Indigenous, Maori and Pacific Islanders cultures and their experiences of colonisation, and she also claimed that all her tenants were unique. Seen through Julie's eyes the uniqueness was attributable to tenants' humanity and had little to do with their cultural backgrounds. Her impassioned desire to treat everyone the same was apparent throughout her interview narrative. Julie's dismissal of the importance of culture supported her appraisal that issues affecting Indigenous housing outcomes did not necessitate culturally specific resources to negotiate them. When asked if she thought it was important to provide Indigenous clients with support from Indigenous agencies, Julie stated, 'in my opinion I don't think it matters who provides the help' she conceded 'but there are some that would just prefer to ... deal with their own people'.

## 7.5 The effects of race capital on respondents' interactions

Julie was one of two respondents within the homogeneity category, in the unique position of working with an Indigenous supervisor in a metropolitan CHO. At the time of the interview Julie was managing 113 properties and found the focus on cultural differences within housing

service provision particularly perplexing. Julie's resolution to action her egalitarian principles within her professional interactions meant that she paid little attention to how culture was negotiated within the social housing field. This was evident when she was asked if having an Indigenous supervisor helped in addressing any cultural issues affecting Indigenous tenants. Julie replied, 'I don't know I always come back to the fact that ... it doesn't matter what culture you are ... if you are given a task to do that involves whatever or whoever everyone should be treated equally the same'. It is important to contextualise this response in terms of Julie's race capital. Julie described herself as a 'dark skinned person', who 'hate[s] the word racist' and did not believe that 'it [racism] exist[s]'. She determinedly dismissed cultural diversity in the name of and under the guise of equality. Julie rarely accessed her supervisor's cultural knowledges because she perceived she did not need to. She placed little value in Indigenous cultural mores and responsibilities throughout her interview narrative and often suggested that Indigenous peoples received benefits that the rest of the population were not eligible for. Outside of the realm of service provision she provided the following example to support her position, suggesting Indigenous people receive:

fairly large amounts of monies ... my son in law ... his cousin just started university and she ... got x amount of allowances or grants or scholarships ... for university studies ... It wasn't just one amount ... I think it was about three or four ... lots of grants ... and she had received it and someone said it's because you know she's Indigenous.

While Julie's asserted that she did not need to access her supervisor's intrinsic cultural understanding to work with Indigenous peoples, this was not the case for her colleague, Sue. Sue was a young Euro-Australian woman, working in the metropolitan CHO for over two years. Sue shared how she accessed her supervisor's intrinsic cultural understandings to help her understand how problematic housing issues, such as crowding and tenancy successions, were connected to, and often created by Indigenous cultural norms and responsibilities. Sue recalled a situation where her supervisor sat in with her on a particularly challenging conversation with an Indigenous tenant. The tenant was considered to have issues around associating and 'dealing with white people'. For Sue, her supervisor's Indigeneity, and therefore her racial capital, afforded her cultural insight, into the interconnectedness and demands of familial and kinship networks and allowed her:

to say ... what's going on with your relatives, are they standing over, what's going on there ... and all those kinds of things ... she ... had the right questions ... maybe framed them the right way ... to get the answers, maybe ... [she] ... was more comfortable asking those questions than ... I was.

While Julie and Sue, held the distinct position of being the only two service providers within a metropolitan setting, across the entire study cohort, to work directly with an Indigenous supervisor, nearly half of the respondents in the homogeneity category, three in regional CHOs and one in a metropolitan SHO, engaged with Indigenous co-workers, friends and partners. Despite these relationships and often respondents' reliance on their Indigenous colleagues and friends' race capital to understand some of the intricacies of Indigenous cultures, respondents' cognisance of cultural differences was similar to those respondents who had little to no engagement with Indigenous peoples outside the realm of service provision.

Whilst many respondents were unable to reflect upon the importance of their cultural identity within professional interactions, some respondents displayed sensitivity to the role of culture for Indigenous peoples and often incorporated actions that demonstrated their intention to deliver culturally sensitive services for their Indigenous tenants. For example, Katrina explained how she sought assurances from her Indigenous colleague:

before I send anything out I will say 'Oh is that ok ... do you think?' and she'll go, 'No, no that's fine' ... or this or that so ... we have others that are Indigenous as well in the workplace so we are quite lucky that we do.

Seeking reassurance from her Indigenous colleagues before corresponding with Indigenous tenants suggested that Katrina considered her race capital did not equip her with what she perceived as adequate understandings about communicating with Indigenous tenants. This was particularly interesting in the context of Katrina's habitus. She shared how some of her best friends from school 'were from Palm Island and Thursday Island and PNG', indicating close and intimate relationships with friends from diverse cultural backgrounds. Katrina demonstrated cultural insight by suggesting that regardless of her exposure to some Indigenous cultural norms and practices, she felt she still needed to seek cultural reassurance by accessing her Indigenous colleague's local knowledges and connection with the community.

Melinda echoed Katrina's appreciation of working with Indigenous colleagues by contending that her colleagues':

local knowledge ... it's invaluable ... if you need to see a tenant about something and you going out the local housing officer might say oh ... but they went to blah, blah, blah because of this that and the other because word just gets out on the local grapevine in the community and they've got all that knowledge ... It's pretty ... useful.

There were numerous examples of respondents, predominantly in regional organisations, relying on their interpersonal and professional knowing of Indigenous people to direct their practice. For example, Wendy suggested that the culmination of her intimate relationships, her tertiary degree and her interactions with Indigenous colleagues provided her with some appreciation of the intricacy of Indigenous cultures. Wendy stated:

we have got a few Indigenous workers ... I have probably pulled on their local knowledge. I have a lot of knowledge too ... and my partner is part Aboriginal ... not that I involve him in any of it but you know, like you know a lot of people ... and their families and that sort of thing ... I did anthropology at uni too ... which gave me a great understanding, a fantastic understanding especially ... how the minorities ... can't look you in the eye and all that sort of thing ... I probably can ... use that information, that's been helpful.

Some respondents had prior experiences working on remote communities which they deemed to be influential in shaping their practice. Wendy described her experiences in the Northern Territory as, 'amazing ... living in a place like that is was just fantastic ... just understanding their cultures over there'. Similarly, Melinda, who at the time of the interview was working for a metropolitan SHO, shared her experiences of working on remote Indigenous communities and explained how an Indigenous staff member was instrumental in preventing a cultural faux pa:

[I] was in a meeting with an Elder probably about six years ago, eight years ago ... I wouldn't have even known what an Elder was up until then ... I was going into the back room to get coffee to serve the Elder and I just pulled a cup out of the kitchen cupboard and ... I was with an Indigenous staff member and on that cup was a picture of a monkey. And I had no idea, she said 'You can't give that



cup' and I said 'Why?' and she said 'Because it's got a monkey' and I didn't realise that was a derogatory term to Indigenous people so if I had done that, that would have been horrific ... so that is the sort of thing that non-Indigenous staff won't know until they have been exposed to it.

Exposure to cultural expectations and norms had the potential to facilitate Melinda's cultural understandings and to guide her professional practice. For many service providers in this study, especially in metropolitan areas, opportunities for exposure to Indigenous colleagues and their understandings of culture, and the availability of time to develop nuanced understandings of cultural differences were almost non-existent.

## 7.6 How the social housing field shapes respondents' interactions

Respondents identified time constraints within the social housing field as one of the key barriers for their professional practice and interactions with Indigenous tenants. Their ability to make time for clients and tenants, or the absence of time because of many organisational demands and their sizeable tenancy portfolios, presented significant challenges for respondents. As Paul stated there are, 'not enough hours in the day for what people do, or [are]expected to do'. These sentiments resonated with respondents' as they drew attention to the paucity of time and the harried interactional nature of service delivery and frontline interactions. Nevertheless, without exception they denoted the importance of 'making time to listen' to their clients, not only as a way of understanding their specific issues and concerns, but also as a means of developing rapport so they could ascertain what sort of help they needed to provide. Most respondents agreed time was the essential ingredient for developing rapport with their tenant population and rapport was deemed vital for developing good working relationships and positive tenancy outcomes. Katrina emphasised how rapport was pivotal for communication with her tenants:

if you don't have that connection ... [ with your tenant] ... if you don't have ... rapport ... with the person you're going to get nowhere ... I think that is really a big factor in a relationship between a tenant and ... the organisation as such. If you don't have that there they're not going to respect you, you can ring up and say ... you need to pay rent, you need to do this, send out breach ... all this kind of stuff but if you don't have that respect there, they're not going to take any

notice really are they... you are going to end up evicting them ... or they are not going to sustain their tenancy ... or they are not going to work with you.

Paul reasoned why he spent time to develop rapport despite being responsible for 140 tenancies:

I don't want the tenant to be evicted for a start ... because it is just going to go around in circles, the person is going to end up homeless; it is going to go back on the Department's list ... and go through that process again ... there is still a better solution to this ... is something that we can do to help ... I would prefer to do that than go through the process of sending the tenant a notice to remedy... then sending the tenant a notice to leave and then if they don't leave I need to apply to the court to have ... a warrant of possession ... that can take time, in the mean time she has stopped paying rent or he stopped paying rent ... not only are we losing there ... might be damages when they leave because they haven't cleaned up they haven't taken their possessions ... or at the end of all that they're back at the Department of Housing register ... so like I say ... it is something that ... property managers need to weigh up I mean I certainly weigh that up ... because you know which is going to be more cost effective for the organisation ... or for me and also for the tenant ... and they will end up with a debt.

## 7.7 Indigenous tenants' reluctance to engage despite egalitarian practice ethos

Despite respondents identifying that establishing rapport was a key ingredient in their interactions with tenants within the social housing field, many articulated that tenants were not 'always forth coming ... so sometimes you have to dig a bit you know ... it is just how you ask the questions'(Wendy). It seemed that to 'dig a little bit' also necessitated spending significant amounts of time with tenants. Many respondents noted that despite their best efforts to promote equal access to housing opportunities and respectful interactions with Indigenous tenants, many Indigenous tenants were reluctant to engage with them. Sue claimed that in her experience:

some people ... can tend to be very guarded, very reluctant to share ... will tell you just what you needed to know and ... don't like to over disclose ... just very guarded but then again I have others you know who will tell me everything ... so

it's hard to say if that is really a cultural thing ... or whether they have had bad experiences.

Paul suggested that some of Indigenous tenants were:

reserved ... not forthcoming ... with information that are troubling them ... so if they have a concern about a neighbour for example they don't initiate that ... they don't come forward ... I've found them to be, you will get the odd one or two who will ... understand the process really well ... and they will generally ... say or make a phone call to you but for the majority of the people that I have ... dealt with most of the time [they are] quite reserved pretty ... withdrawn ... I mean not forthcoming with information ... with things that are often a concern for them ... unless they get ... to a point where there is nowhere else to turn ... or ... they feel perhaps a bit of hopelessness ... then they will come forward but it is not something I have found them coming forward immediately... after the event ... They have their own reasons, I certainly have asked one or two of them as to why it wasn't reported earlier ... they weren't able to give me a straight answer ... they would sort of look at the ground and sort of you know shake their head ... so I want to ... make them feel at ease ... put them at ease, I am there to listen to hear what they have to say about that ... but to also reassure them that I would like to help them and follow through ... if it was something that was in breach of the tenancy.

For some Indigenous tenants the reluctance to be forthcoming and open about issues effecting their tenancies indicates a lack of trust and a form of resistance and/or using their agency to rally against a white neo-liberal mainstream housing system (Milligan et al., 2011; Moran et al., 2016; Nash, 2016). The ongoing disregard of Indigenous tenants' cultural mores and practices within the mainstream social housing policy and many organisational procedures helps to explaining Indigenous tenants' reluctance to engage (Milligan et al., 2011; Nash, 2016). Furthermore, the likelihood of punitive actions being enforced by housing officers when Indigenous cultural obligations are adhered to, such as sharing of their home with extended family and kin, are considerably high (Habibis et al., 2016a). When it came to issues of maintenance, Wendy thought that Indigenous tenants were often reluctant to share any concerns because:

they're scared ... that they're going to get trouble ... they have to pay for it, things like that ... we also work out a payment plan with our tenants ... if there is damage and they can't pay for the full amount well, we do work out a payment plan and they pay a little bit extra with their rent each fortnight ... until it is paid off and they sign an agreement and all that kind of thing so they are able to do that. And when you explain that to them they are a lot more likely...[to]... come forward a lot more with things.

## 7.8 The importance of interpersonal communication

Although some Indigenous tenants were perceived to be reluctant communicators, many respondents maintained that the best way to engage with Indigenous tenants was using interpersonal face-to-face communication strategies. Paul claimed:

I find that the face to face interaction ... comes across as more genuine because I want to see their body language and they need to see mine ... which is something that can't be seen or ... expressed over the phone ... I like to show to them that I ... need to or would like to help them ... and we really need to keep the dialogue going ... so ... there can be a positive result or outcome at the end of it ... how I ... address or speak to a [tenant]... it is always with ... humbleness, I don't know whether it comes across that way ... [I] certainly want [it] to.

Paul also maintained that it was especially important for him to create:

an environment or an atmosphere where ... they can see that I am genuinely trying, sincere ... and I am wanting to get a picture of their circumstances ... see how we can assist them ... but I want them to feel safe as well ... that they have the confidence to share those[sic] information that we need ... for us to be able to ... give help ... it is really listening to the person and then identifying how you can work together ... with the person because they ... will certainly have a better idea of what they need, what their real needs are ... and so it is walking along with the person ... and just picking up the type of aid or help that they need on their path ... as I say listening and ... understanding what their needs might be, and ... I also need to be equipped myself ... as to what help is out there ... that we can ... tap into.

Sue shared how she adopted a less formal approach when conversing with her Indigenous tenants, suggesting that she did:

act differently, I'm more relaxed, my language does change a little bit ... because I think presenting myself as this housing worker, you know you've got to come across as not a friendly approach but a little bit more relaxed maybe ... because I think people can get a bit anxious if you present yourself in this formal way, you have to kind to chat with them about their family, what's been going on with them before you start getting into some serious (laughs) stuff ... I tend to sort of be more ... friendly in my approach anyway I do ask them about what is going on in their lives, you know if they want to talk sometimes that can help their wellbeing ... particularly those who don't have any social outlets ... there is a line though (laughs) ... keeping it short and sweet ... not getting into too much ... of that ... but just being approachable because people will more likely come to you with issues and be more honest ... if you're approachable.

Sue alluded to the paradox of time management by suggesting keeping the interaction 'short and sweet', however, the rationale for this approach was not clarified. Wendy determined that face-to-face interactions could also be utilised as a strategic method for holding tenants accountable for issues effecting tenancy sustainment, claiming that, 'sometimes if you just talk face to face with people they realise that they have got to take some responsibility for their actions'. Wendy, who managed 35 tenancies for a regional CHO, had more time to address issues with her tenant population face-to-face, due in part to her relatively small portfolio.

## 7.9 Indigenous exclusion from the private rental market

Many respondents offered insights into the how real estate agents and owners display racist attitudes and prejudice towards Indigenous homeless peoples. Lily, who at the time of the interview, had been working for a regional CHO for 17 years suggested:

our housing is over represented by Indigenous ... it is probably because they cannot at times access the private market ... we have had that happen to us where we have got through a list of rentals and I have walked in with an Indigenous person and the real estate will tell you that they won't lease to them ... even if they are not even on the TICA or anything ... they won't rent to the Indigenous

... very racist real estate sector... I won't say everyone is but a lot are ... it has happened to probably ... half a dozen staff members here over the years ... I will be with the Indigenous clients who say yes we will take this house this is the one we like and they will say it is no longer available, ok if that one is not available what one is, none of them are available, you haven't got a house for rent in all the town, nuh, gone they are all gone ... so they have never actually come out and said it to you they have just suddenly said there is no rentals available.

Lily spoke of her sense of helplessness when confronted with her clients' experiences of explicit forms of racism. She was deeply motivated to counteract and remedy the social and psychological harms these interactions potentially created for Indigenous homeless individuals and families. Lily's exposure to Indigenous people's explicit experiences of discrimination in the private housing market, reaffirmed her attempts to apply well-intentioned egalitarian practice to her interactions with Indigenous clients. Lily implied that discrimination was also evident in the social housing sector, albeit less overt than in the private rental sector. She described how Indigenous tenants were excluded from social housing options due to the mismatch between conventional housing stock and the size of Indigenous families in her area. Lily suggested that Indigenous families are generally large typically, two adults and six children and standard social housing stock was inadequate to meet the accommodation needs of large Indigenous families. Generally, standard mainstream houses comprise 3-4 bedrooms, which by design, are often inappropriate to meet the needs of large Indigenous families.

## 7.10 The implications and importance of tenancy mix

Tenancy mix was collectively agreed upon as a critical factor in maintaining and sustaining successful tenancies (Atkinson, 2008). This was particularly pertinent in regional setting as respondents' local knowledge of the familial and relational nature of their Indigenous tenants assisted in the management of successful Indigenous tenancies and getting the optimal tenancy mix. Katrina's narrative highlights this claim:

you've ... got to look ... especially with the Indigenous families ... some families don't actually get on ... that is something that you have to be aware of and take into consideration as well so unless, and see this is the big thing, if you don't know this area if you don't have that connection with the community you are not going to know that.

For most metropolitan service providers, familial and relational knowledge of their tenant population was rare, which necessitated them implementing other strategies when addressing the complexities around property allocation and tenancy mix. Sue said:

you've ... got to think about how that person is going to fit in with that particular community ... so sometimes someone with maybe a bit of a lesser need will be chosen because ... they would fit good in that complex ... they are the sort of person that that environment needs right now ... because things have been shaken up maybe and they need someone that is going to be[a] more ... calm sort of individual maybe ... so you have got to sort of balance the two really ... but I've never had any sort of ... anxieties around ... choosing one person over another ... it's more about, I, need to justify this choice ... so what are my reasons instead of going oh I want that person ... you do have to separate yourself from the decision.

Sue's dialogue captured how the combination of her discretionary power and professional judgement determined the tenancy mix within complexes and other properties. Even though respondents used their discretionary power in their decisions around tenancy mix, many were reluctant to apply their discretion to address difficulties many tenants were facing in negotiating the competing demands between tenancy arrangements and cultural obligations.

## 7.11 Professional application of discretionary power within service delivery

Respondents within the homogeneity category described how they were constrained by inadequate resources to meet the increasing demand of their Indigenous service users and tenants. Their organisations were heavily focused on administrative tasks which often meant they had little time to spend with tenants. Many of the respondents had experiential understandings of the importance of culture for Indigenous tenants however many were cautious using their discretionary power to mitigate the impact Indigenous cultural practices often have for sustaining mainstream tenancy agreements. For Chris, who at the time of the interview, was working for a metropolitan CHO, the key objective of her organisation was to 'give them tools and knowledge to sustain their tenancy', not to use discretionary power as a way of preventing tenancy failure. Service providers within the homogeneity category reasoned that if they deliver respectful and non- discriminatory 'help' to Indigenous clients,

this would presumably equip them with the tools and knowledge to navigate a white housing system. Therefore, the responsibility for maintaining successful tenancies was assigned to Indigenous tenants because they had been given the same services as other clients. However, there were some respondents who identified using discretionary power in their interactions with tenants. For example, Wendy explained how her experiences as a single mother influenced the way she interacted with an Indigenous tenant to help prevent her from becoming homeless. She reflected:

I know I probably shouldn't do this but ... you know someone with problems and ... I have related to them ... I sort of understand what you are going through you know I have been down that sort of track myself ... I have been a single parent for 10 years I understand all that, how hard it is ... and you know like maybe we can help you do a budget up or something like that, whereas I wouldn't show that side of myself to a lot people.

Sue described how her use of discretionary power within the allocation process did not manifest in the way she envisioned. She recalled:

sometimes you try to do the right thing and just think I'm not sure if this person is quite right but I'm going to give them a go ... and I've done that before and it's bitten me on the bum ... it was specifically with an Indigenous tenant ... who was presented to me from housing as a single woman ... unfortunately during the interview process she hid the fact that she also had five children that were living with her mother ... who was just down the road so the kids would come over and run around and were unsupervised. Then the cousins would come over because they didn't have anywhere to stay so they would try and bunk at her place, and it was just, it was a complex of 17 units and all the action that was going in this one little unit ... just spilled out ... so it wasn't pretty and unfortunately that tenant even though we tried to get connected with support ... she was very reluctant. We tried to get her other accommodation that was probably more suitable to her situation ... where she could have access to her children where you know she could stay housed but she actually just preferred to hang out in the Valley ... is basically what she said ... she would go away from her unit, she wouldn't be there for two weeks, and then just come back, stay a few nights off again, she just preferred to live that way.



For many respondents, their decisions to use their discretionary power was intertwined with their previous exposure to education and training as well as their engagement with Indigenous people outside the parameters of providing housing services for them.

### 7.12 Respondents' perceptions of culturally responsive training programs

Over half of the respondents in this category indicated they had some rudimentary education around Indigenous cultures either through university training and/or organisational cultural training programs. Generally, the knowledges respondents garnered through these programs were deemed as beneficial for their practice. Paul's appraisal included suggestions that training programs were helpful because they were 'targeted towards the people that you come across in the course of your day'. Paul stated that training helped him to identify, 'how you can be more effective when you're in the role'. For Sue, her university education provided her with theoretical understanding of Indigenous culture, and this fostered some insight into tenancy issues such as crowded Indigenous households. She claimed:

I haven't done training, any specific training, but ... I've got an undergrad degree in Psychology and ... we did do components on ... the culture ... we did talk a lot about the culture ... but I wouldn't say that I have had any specific training on how to manage tenancies of Indigenous tenants ... With the issues of overcrowding [some] ... people grew up in situations where there was maybe up to ten people living ... in the household ... so that is just entirely normal to them ... so I think ... understanding that ... this can be a normal thing for people ... and ... a lot of people are very transient so they might go bush ... come back don't have anywhere to stay, crash with a relative ... until they are ... able to find something ... that happens quite a lot.

Those respondents that did have access to culturally responsive training and theoretical understandings around Indigenous cultures appeared to be more willing to consider their learning within their understandings of cultural practices and behaviours that potentially impacted on Indigenous tenancies than those in the homogeneity group that had no formal or industry training.

## 7.13 Conclusion

This chapter has reported how respondents' beliefs in egalitarianism, equal opportunities and sameness created an idea of social housing service delivery as a race and power-free zone. These assumptions are problematic from a critical race perspective as they fail to consider the role race and power play in structuring and mediating their interactions with Indigenous service users and the decisions they make affecting the lives of Indigenous tenants. At the micro-interactional level of frontline service provision, most respondents were deeply motivated to help address Indigenous tenants' explicit disadvantage within the field of social housing by enacting respectful, empathetic and considered interpersonal interactions. Despite respondents in the homogeneity category dedicating considerable time to promote these practices and developing rapport with Indigenous clients and tenants, many were confronted by the reluctance of Indigenous tenants to engage and confide with respondents.

It appears that respondents rarely considered that Indigenous tenants' reluctance to engage may have been shaped by a lack of trust and a form of resistance against a white neoliberal mainstream housing system. These issues may have been further complicated if Indigenous tenants perceived service providers' disregard of the legitimacy of cultural mores and norms and the impact these have in Indigenous tenants' access to opportunities to secure and maintain mainstream housing tenures.

Respondents' assumption that we are all the same created the prism through which white culture asserted its dominance, as respondents' belief in the existence of equal opportunities located the burden of responsibility for tenancy sustainment squarely with Indigenous populations. Respondents' did not recognise racial privilege or racial marginalisation, which determined Indigenous experiences of discrimination and exclusion as an individualised problem rather than as a racialised and societal one. This individualisation of exclusion and discrimination also maintained the invisibility shrouding racial privilege afforded to most respondents within this category. While respondents' standpoints were situated in homogenised understandings of cultural difference, at times some respondents' position and understandings 'dipped' within other categories on the continuum of racial understandings of difference.

Respondents articulated the importance of their habitus in constructing the values and norms that they drew upon in their professional practice, however most respondents were perplexed

and displayed difficulty in understanding how their racial identities shaped interactions with Indigenous service users and tenants. These interactions were therefore constructed and shaped predominately by respondents' one-dimensional cultural understandings. By being motivated to 'help' Indigenous tenants through delivering undifferentiated service provision, respondents ignored the host of disadvantages that are unique to Indigenous homeless and tenant populations.

A distinct feature of the homogeneity category is respondents' immutable and genuine belief that their egalitarianism practice ethos allowed them to provide Indigenous people with equal opportunities, and this meant they were treating everyone the same. In Chapter Eight, I present the findings from the heterogeneity category on the continuum of racial understandings of difference that explores how respondents in this category understood cultural differences and examines. The chapter examines the potential impact these understandings have for service delivery and housing outcomes for Indigenous homeless and tenant populations.

## 8 Culture is important

### 8.1 Introduction

This chapter reports how respondents' understandings of cultural difference constructed the last category on the continuum of racial understandings of difference, the heterogeneity category. In this category respondents understood Indigenous culture in relation to white culture, not separate from it. They recognised the importance, vibrancy and impact of cultural diversity as a source of privilege and disadvantage. Respondents also displayed deep insight into the impact of white cultural hegemony on minority populations. Unique to the heterogeneity category, was respondents' ability to explore the privilege and dominance of white cultural norms and values and they contrasted these with the mores and responsibilities related to Indigenous cultures. Indigenous traditions and obligations are legitimated in these respondents' understandings of the cultural issues involved in their interactions with Indigenous clients and tenants. The heterogeneity category reflects respondents' beliefs that culture is intrinsically valuable to Indigenous people's identity and their daily lives. Furthermore, respondents' understandings included explorations of the imposition of white cultural expectations on Indigenous populations and how these contribute, maintain and help to explain Indigenous disadvantage and housing exclusion. Respondents' cognisance of the intersection between cultural differences at the interface of service provision, together with their broader considerations of the societal forces shaping Indigenous inequality and white Euro-Australian privileges; significantly influenced how they engage with Indigenous tenants. This was evidenced in the discretion they employed to mitigate the tensions between tenant's practices and behaviours and social housing requirements. Features of the heterogeneity category is that many respondents' subjectivities and sensibilities challenged the dominance of white normative cultural values as the universal standards against which other cultures are measured and judged by. Respondents' drew upon their habitus and race capital to promote the legitimacy and inherent value of Indigenous cultural mores, norms and practices.

## 8.2 Cultural understandings constructing the heterogeneity category

Throughout the research narratives respondents in this category showed significant understandings of how Indigenous cultural mores and values sit in opposition to Euro-Australian normative values. Respondents indicated their appreciation for the interconnected nature of Indigenous familial and kin relationships, and acknowledged how cultural expectations of sharing and reciprocity created challenges in the management of mainstream Indigenous tenancies. Respondents' understandings were constituted through significantly different experiences and racial resources. Collectively these understandings were underscored by valuing of Indigenous cultures and respondents' deep empathy for tenants juggling cultural obligations within the demands of their tenancy arrangements. For some respondents, these understandings came from experiential understanding of the intrinsic value of culture in their daily life, and for others in the heterogeneity category these understandings were shaped by their vicarious experiences of the intricacies of Indigenous cultural norms and values, gathered through their relationships with friends, intimate partners and/or colleagues.

Many of the respondents in this category, from Indigenous and cultural minority backgrounds, demonstrated understandings of cultural difference that were similar to those narratives comprising the homogeneity category, in as much as they advocated for a collective humanity. However, the construction of this homogenised humanity, stemmed from fundamentally different origins. For example, respondents' in the homogeneity category, only identified Indigenous culture in their understandings of cultural differences, and they mostly suggested these differences were inconsequential to their professional practice and interactions with Indigenous peoples. They assumed and enacted a colour evasiveness and power evasiveness (Frankenberg, 1993) approach in their interactions, thereby dismissing the significance of race and difference and how this may impact Indigenous service users and tenants. However, respondents in the heterogeneity category, often invoked a collective humanity ideology as a mechanism to counter their implicit understandings of the experiences of discrimination *because* of differences. Unlike the respondents in the homogeneity category, these respondents were acutely aware of the impact of racial differing, and they chose to focus on the similarities and interconnectedness of all human beings to address discrimination. Whilst many narratives were prefaced with

discourses such as ‘we are all human beings’ (Shannon) and ‘we are all Australians’ (Polly), supporting these claims were embedded understandings of the lived experience of differences that culminated in respondents’ subjective understanding of being ‘othered’. Shannon offered insight into race difference and how this played out in her position in a regional CHO:

with my husband and myself, like me being a darker colour ... he’s of Aboriginal descent ... but he could pass as just non-Indigenous ... I feel it more so because I was identified first because of my skin colour, not because who I was and ... I was spoken to because of that not because of who I am. I said you would’ve been probably spoken to cause of ... who you are ... not from your skin colour ... his like ‘Oh yeh’ ... so at the same time we might agree on something but have different understandings of emotional strains of how we feel about it ... which I don’t carry in here [the organisation] but ... in a sense I try not to be judgmental, I carry that with me ... towards ... Indigenous people, ethnic people in general ... that racism sort of thing because of the way you look.

Within this narrative Shannon not only mentioned the ‘emotional strains’ of being racially ‘othered’ and how these understandings shaped her professional practice, she explicitly emphasised the varying degrees of discrimination based around skin colour and how these comparably shaped her and her husband’s experiences of being Indigenous people.

Respondents’ narratives in this category demonstrated the overlap across and within continuum categories, specifically the homogeneity and heterogeneity categories. The intersectionality between these categories brings to light the intra/inter relational nature of the dimensions and the narratives that constructed the distinct categories. Furthermore, the overlap between these categories demonstrated that respondents’ understandings were not neatly located within one discrete category and in effect reveal the contested, hybrid, fluid and iterative nature of these respondents’ constructions, discourses and ideologies of cultural differences. Whilst respondents advocated for a homogenised collective humanity, paradoxically their understandings and dominant narratives comprised indelible experiences of being racially ‘othered.’ Their subjective, experiential and professional understandings of cultural ‘othering’ shifted their focus from one of homogeneity to one primarily of heterogeneity.

For those respondents in this category from Euro-Australian backgrounds, they also demonstrated throughout their narratives a deep appreciation for the vitality of Indigenous cultural mores and practices and the importance of these within the everyday lived experiences of Indigenous peoples. Largely, these understandings stem from and were strengthened by respondents' vicarious experiences of the value of Indigenous culture and the impact of discrimination and marginalisation within the housing sector.

### 8.3 Profile of participants

The subjective and professional understandings of two male and 12 female respondents constructed the heterogeneity category. Four respondents were Indigenous, five were from cultural minority backgrounds and five were Euro-Australians. Half of the respondents worked within metropolitan CHOs managing caseloads of over 100 properties. Generally, those respondents in metropolitan settings managed fewer Indigenous tenancies than those in regional settings, however all respondents either worked with Indigenous colleagues and/or had relationships with Indigenous peoples outside the realm of service provision. Nearly half of the respondents in regional settings worked for ICHOs. Over a third of respondents have more than a decade of experience within the social housing sector (see Table 8-1), which contrasts with the years of respondents' experience in the hierarchy and homogeneity categories.

**Table 8-1: Respondents' profile in the heterogeneity category**

Gender	Cultural Background	Geographical Setting (n)	Types of Organisation (n)	Role in Orgs.	Tenancies managed (n)	Current exp.(yrs) in the field	Respondents' (n) previous exp. in the housing sector
Male 2	Indigenous-Aust 4	Metropolitan 7	ICHO 6	Housing officer 5	Between 10-100 3	Between 1-2yrs 3	CHO 2
Female 12	Euro-Australian 5	Regional 7	CHO 7	Tenancies Support Worker 2	Between 100-200 6	Between 2-4yrs 3	None 12
	Cultural-minority 5		SHO 1	Operational Supervisor 4		Between 4-10yrs 3	
				Senior Manager 3		Over 10yrs 5	

### 8.4 Experience in the field shaped professional practice

Despite the variations between where respondents were employed and the number of tenancies they managed, the stand-out feature of the heterogeneity category was respondents'

years of experience accrued in the social housing field. Nowhere else within the data set is there evidence of the level of experience apparent within the heterogeneity cohort. This proved to be an especially important consideration for various reasons. Experience within the sector appears to be one of the key factors that influenced how respondents navigated and negotiated the demands of their role and the management of Indigenous tenancies. Gail, who at the time of the interview was working for a metropolitan SHO, noted within her 13 years of working within the social housing field, she had found:

a lot of housing services ... work differently ... my personal opinion, is that it depends on the makeup of the staff and what experience they have ... not only their personal life experience but their work experience as well ... within housing and ... some housing service centres, I don't want to say that they won't care about the cultural factor but they ... have got their blinkers on and it's just all policy, you're causing overcrowding you need to be breached ... they need to go or you're going to be evicted ... they just play down that hard line ... it is only experience that will get you through those hard situations.

Respondents' experiences in the sector also proved to be pivotal in their navigation of organisational requirements and communication with management, stakeholders and in some cases, Board members. For example, Ella, who at the time of the interview, had been employed within a regional ICHO for 17 years, and her practice experience, together with her senior position enabled her to request that Board members trust her judgement and demonstrated her willingness to advocate for her tenants. Ella stated:

a lot of times tenants will come in and say something ... and say 'Ok we know you won't say our names to get approval from the Board' ... I have to tell the Board, this is the situation I am not going to say who it is or whatever you will have to trust me on that.

For Gail, 'it definitely ... comes down to experience and it comes down to who you bounce your ideas on'. Another key feature of the heterogeneity category was the influence of respondents' habitus and race capital on their interactions with Indigenous service users and tenants.

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## 8.5 The influence of respondents' habitus within interactions

Distinct to the respondents in the heterogeneity category was how they normalised the behaviours and cultural practices of their Indigenous tenants through drawing on experiences from their own racial habitus. Mostly, respondents perceived these understandings to be beneficial for their engagement with Indigenous service users and tenants, however for some, understandings from their habitus inhibited their professional practice and frontline interactions. For Polly, a tenancy support worker in a regional ICHO, she determined that her habitus provided significant insights into how cultural differences created challenges for Indigenous tenants. Polly suggested:

maybe this is because I come from different culture as well ... I see some similarities with Indigenous culture ... I can identify with ... some of the Indigenous struggles when it comes to family or boundaries or ... protocols ... that's my aunty she's come ... She's here you know ... that's it. She's my elder she's this, she's ... so many things .... from our cultural side you are part of the community, you are not an individual.

Ella drew comparable cultural understandings between her own cultural mores and those of her Indigenous tenants, suggesting that her:

culture is very similar to this extended families ... in the same way we have big aunties big uncles and ... when we say family we don't actually only talk about the core family ... like when I say daughters it is not only my two daughters, my nieces ... they all call me like big mother small mother like that ... and even when a niece gets married we all have a mother's role to play in that wedding ... there's hardly any difference in that extended families ... even though I am thousands and thousands of miles away I still have my obligations that I have to meet with my family... so I can totally understand ... we are not talking about the core family when we are talking about an Indigenous family ... or even people who come from multicultural backgrounds ... it is our way ... we have a lot of people and we do a lot of cooking ... and my neighbours constantly say to me oh my gosh you have so many visitors ... and I say to my husband if we didn't own this home they would have complained about us (laughs).

What is telling within Ella's narrative is her acknowledgement of how her normative cultural behaviour would be problematised if she did not own her home. This understanding equipped her with empathy for those trying to negotiate cultural norms with the realms and regulations within the social housing system. For Helen, her childhood experiences were inextricably linked to her professional understandings and practices:

I was born in the UK ... we migrated out here ... we arrived in Australia in 1974 in Darwin and then we moved down to Papunya which is about 150 miles out of Alice Springs ... something that I remember really vividly... Mum ... used to publish the ... newsletter and I used to deliver it and there was this big emphasis on sexually transmitted diseases ... and I must have heard some conversations that it stays with me about people not having access to penicillin and actually dying ... in the 70s of these diseases ... their noses would be eaten away and they would have big holes in the middle of their face ... you would see this and as a little girl ... a very impressionable little girl you would see these women walking down the road with their faces being eating away by this venereal disease ... so it was quite shocking and ... I was enormously impacted on by that because it just seemed to me as though there was something going on here that everyone should know about but no one was doing anything ... It seemed very strange in this white privileged world that I was living in that these things were going on ... so ... that was my seminal experience I suppose and then in terms of how that's played out in my approach to managing Indigenous tenancies, I have to say most of the time it has left me in a position where I really don't know what to do.

Tony, who at the time of the interview was working for a metropolitan CHO, reflected how his habitus shaped his understandings of cultural differences. He explained:

my name alone ... is very ethnic...while we had those European names in a lot of ways we ... were not reared in a European household and ... in an Italian community. We were ... hodge podge with our close family friends who were Indian and then we had the ... Scottish Irish. There was very much a mixture in ours but ... there was this perception that we were this Italian family but without connections to that culture there, because dad had left ... that side of his family ... so we got it at school, we copped a lot for being Italian but we didn't have the culture and the supports there to back that up ... that caused me to drop out of

school and a lot of the behaviours around that but ... I think that gave me ... sort of a good knowledge and understanding of, well not to the extent that many other people have of being ostracised and disadvantaged.

Tony described how he:

spent a few years in Vietnam, which ... was a wonderful experience for me ... because basically I was a fish out of water ... having to learn and adapt to another culture ... the Vietnamese are very proud people and you mold to their culture ... I mean that gave me a bit of an understanding to the barriers that people can face ... by no means do I think I am expert in culture ... especially Indigenous culture but I think I have a bit of gleaning into what it's like being outside ... the cultural norm.

Tony portrayed the significance of childhood discrimination and combined these understandings with his experiences of acculturation within Vietnamese communities and cultures to substantiate his knowledge of living outside the cultural norms. He also suggested:

I think if I hadn't had those experiences ... I certainly wouldn't be where I am today and I don't think my practice would be where it is ... it's been a privilege ... an absolute privilege to be able to ... take those learnings and incorporate that into my practice.

For some respondents, the culmination of their habitus, professional interactions and subjective, intimate relations provided a glimpse into how they perceive the richness and inherent significance of culture for Indigenous people. Ruby, who was working with a metropolitan CHO, intertwined all these aspects in her reflection stating:

You are who you are and you end up how you end because of how you've been raised and ... where you've been raised ... by those cultural norms that surround you as you ... grow from a child to an adult ... it effects ... how you relate to the world around you and everyone in it ... I married an Indigenous man, I'm not married to him anymore but ... what I learnt from being ... part of a large Indigenous family is there ... is difference even within ... a cultural group ... and there isn't just one rule that fits everybody because I have actually been a part of that Indigenous family for over 12 years ... and I'm still connected to those

people through our daughter that we have together ... there isn't just ... that one rule within a culture ... not every Sudanese person likes it is this way, not every Iraqi person likes it that way ... and certainly not every Indigenous Australians likes it a particular [way].

Rhianna, who was working for a regional ICHO, also drew upon her former marriage with an Indigenous man to detail her understanding of cultural obligations of sharing your home with extended family and kin:

my ex-partner is Indigenous and it used to happen all the time ... you know it is going to happen ... family come who never tell you when they are going to go (laughs) ... 'Oh mum's on her way', 'Oh who's coming with her?', 'Oh six of them', 'How long are they staying?' 'Oh I don't know' (laughs) ... 'Does she know?', 'Nuh' ... and I am one of those persons that likes my peace and my zen, and it was like ok, as long as I just have breaks and have some space ... and I love the family and his mum never used to wear out her welcome too much ... that's just part and parcel ... of how it goes.

## 8.6 Race capital shapes interactions

Evident within all these narratives in the heterogeneity category was respondents' ability to reflect on their habitus to inform their understandings of the difference or similarities between their racialised habitus and that of their Indigenous tenants. Notably, respondents' race capital also proved to be instrumental in shaping their understanding of the challenges of the white neoliberal housing sector places on the cultural demands of Indigenous tenants. Helen perceived her race capital as detrimental to her practice. She said:

it's very difficult I think coming into a situation from that background of white privilege, I've seen Indigenous women when I have worked in family violence and housing go in and say to another Indigenous woman, you know clean the place up it's a shithole ... sort your kids out ... get your act together and get your head out of your bum and you get him out of the house now because he is trouble but we can't do that ... but that seems to be a style that works really well. A very clear, direct style but you know we can't do that ... because we've already done that for the last 150 years ... you know and it's just it's not going to work ... we'll get a lot of push back you know.

Deb's experiences also reflected challenges of being a white worker with Indigenous women. Deb managed temporary crisis accommodation for Indigenous women and children escaping domestic and family violence, providing accommodation and an intensive support program for 12 weeks. This support was conditional on tenants setting goals for procuring alternate accommodation, sending children to school and adhering to the rules of the shared accommodation. Enforcing these regulations often meant Deb was accused by the clients of being culturally inappropriate, however she maintained:

I'll talk to other women the staff or other clients and I think ... that's not true ... that sounds like you're using that as an excuse to not do what you've said you'll do ... and I guess ... if it came from a person from their own culture maybe it wouldn't be something ... and that that's why I am very lucky to have strong Aboriginal and Islander women working for me because if that cultural stuff comes up I will refer to them ... because they know it and understand it better than I do they'll be front up straight up with it ... you know and I certainly ... wouldn't say to a woman that's you can't say that, I would just refer back to the women who know the culture and live the culture and they'll quite often front them on it ... and say what a load of rubbish ... I couldn't work in an Indigenous service without good staff, without you know strong Aboriginal and Islander women ... to back me up because I do get the racist thing occasionally ... you know... as a white person you are not going to know their culture and I just I wouldn't speak to them about their culture because it's not my place I don't know enough about it ... whereas the staff are confident enough in their own culture to discuss that sort of thing ... so having good backup is essential.

Deb raises a critical point in her narrative that was echoed throughout many respondents' interview dialogue. She emphasised the importance of Indigenous colleagues providing services to Indigenous peoples. However, for Indigenous service providers, the expectation from organisations, colleagues, and clients that they are best suited to interact because of 'the cultural stuff' placed additional burdens on their already demanding role. For the most part, Indigenous respondents suggested they accepted expectations willingly, however they identified the extra demands placed on them due to their race capital, as Meredith illustrated in her reflection:

I, as a senior housing worker ... manage this portfolio ... that's quite large ... supervising housing workers I couldn't be doing [it] ... it's not like I don't want to be do it ... like I can't do it all ... So I can't be it for all this Indigenous community you know (laughs) which is ... quite large ... and having to do this other role you know what I mean ... If I am doing that I need to be resourced a bit better ... Because people were coming in the door, they were phoning I was getting emails ... getting bombarded by just general inquiries. You know some people can't engage ... and find that difficult and [that is] where's the black face ... I want to talk to a ... Indigenous person and there's no workers there so ... that's always ... difficult ... we are not resourced to be doing all that work there. I can't be doing it because ... I'm doing this other stuff.

Meredith also highlighted the dynamics of being the only Indigenous face within the organisation and how Indigenous tenants automatically navigated toward her, and notes the tension between wanting to help and not having the time or sufficient resources to be able to offer that help.

## 8.7 The role the social housing field plays in respondents' interactions

Respondents in the heterogeneity category demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of how requirements governing the social housing field are not culturally adaptive to meet the cultural needs of many of their Indigenous tenants. It is within these understandings that respondents enacted their professional practice and interactions. Some respondents claimed they had a degree of flexibility in meeting policy and organisational requirements whilst endeavouring to meet their tenants' specific needs. Tricia, a senior manager within an ICHO contended:

there is now a big national framework for housing ... and our policies have to measure to the national framework ... so there is not a great deal of movement in ... your policies ... [they] have to be on line with the national standard ... you can do other things you can have a procedure that actually, what can I say, fits in with the policies somehow ... I guess that is a challenge for us to manage ... our own housing stock and housing stock belonging to the Department ... when it comes to the Department of Housing houses that we manage or state housing we have to

conform to their regulations ... and that is difficult ... because you are running two sets of requirements.

Ella suggested part of the role of service delivery was to meet the requirements of the social housing field, and maintained, 'you just can't go off just doing your own thing, you know you can't do that if you are working for an organisation ... you must ... abide by the policies and principles of that organisation'. She added:

our policies and procedures are not very rigid, so everything we say it's on a case by case ... basis, that's how we cover ourselves ... because what we do with this client may necessarily not ... [be]... what we can do with another client, so that's something the managers, the workers ... [are]... all aware ... [of] ... sometimes they do throw that question back at the managers, and say oh but you did that for that client ... yes we did do that but we did that because this ... was there for that person ... but it is not the same thing for this person ... so I think when you deal with human beings you can't have a rigid framework ... it has to be a little bit flexible.

Polly, who worked within the same organisation, supported Ella's understandings, stating:

we haven't had any policy that is ... really limiting us ... so we haven't come across anything that is limiting us. I think ... our policy actually gives us some sort of flexibility in respect to the group of people we are dealing with, the challenges that we have to dealing with. For instance, you know whereas other housing providers would ... clamp a breach ... in our situation we understand the complexity and we try and accommodate and enhance the tenancy support service to go and try and remedy ... so it's not a one, two, three you're out ... even if sometimes you want to do that ... but it's really around ... having that flexibility ... to use our tools and tricks and you know how can we better empower this person rather than just going oh sorry ... so, no I think it supports us to really get in there and have as many goes as we possibly can, and as they are wanting from us as well.

The notion of flexibility within respondents' interpretation of the regulations governing the social housing field was not equally reflected by respondents working in metropolitan community housing or state housing organisations. Despite respondents' narratives

demonstrating a collective understanding of the clash between white mainstream housing policy agendas and the cultural needs of their Indigenous tenant population, respondents within metropolitan settings largely believed they had little flexibility to negotiate the policy and cultural divide for their Indigenous tenants. Respondents' flexibility, or lack of it, played a significant role in shaping their interactions with Indigenous clients, therefore it was important to tease out some of the differences within respondents' social housing fields to consider the potential benefits and implications.

A common thread weaved through respondents' experiences of working within ICHOs, being the belief that the organisation was not only connected to, but an integral part of the local community. Respondents suggested the continuity of service provision, often delivered by the same staff members for many years, created relational connections that helped foster largely positive interactions with tenant populations. Rhianna drew upon her 18 years of experience to make the point:

I have worked here for so long ... and there is such a sense of community connection and a lot of our tenants have been here as long as I have ... I have always found that I have been pretty well accepted I have never ... really felt like there is ... any issues there ... in terms of cultural differences.

The idea of enhancing community within service provision was distinctive to these organisations. Respondents adopted a holistic approach to address the plethora of underlying issues that were obstructing successful tenancy engagement and housing outcomes for tenants. In the main, they were in the enviable position of having access to culturally-specific and wrap-around support services, frequently resulting in supported accommodation options for tenants. This was identified by these respondents as instrumental in managing many issues facing some Indigenous tenants. These organisations also comprised a mixture of culturally diverse staff which is lauded as a key ingredient in delivering culturally sensitive services to Indigenous tenants. Ella suggested it was that combination that provided best service options for tenants, 'sometimes they don't want Indigenous people to come into their life ... I listen to these things because they feel they're scared that ... the information is not confidential'.

Many respondents supported Ella's contention that some Indigenous people avoid Indigenous specific organisations because of concerns of breaches in confidentiality. All of the



abovementioned benefits of community connections, continuity of service provision, cultural diversity of staff members was largely absent from the narratives of those respondents working in metropolitan setting, where issues of confidentiality were rarely presented.

## 8.8 Respondents' understandings of confidentiality at the frontline

Issues surrounding housing workers maintaining confidentiality around Indigenous tenants' circumstances was deemed problematic amongst many respondents particularly those respondents in regional settings. Most respondents spoke of the ambiguity around confidentiality and the impact this ambiguity had for Indigenous tenants. Some constructed the absence of confidentiality as a cultural practice, as Rhianna explained:

people know that I have been here that long they would probably assume that I would have, I might tell other workers ... I have never had anyone specifically say 'Oh I'll tell you but don't tell' ... so I think the assumptions made once one person here knows something everyone knows ... no matter how much you promise confidentiality ... It's just like that, community (laughs).

Rhianna did not equate breaches of confidentiality as a professional and/or ethical issue as she suggested it was 'just like that in community'. Many respondents within the heterogeneity category however, provided examples to the contrary, revealing how their Indigenous tenants often avoided Indigenous organisations because they are staffed with family members. Ruby recalled how an Indigenous mum:

in the four bedroom house with the three young ones ... quite explicitly said to me do not refer me to an Indigenous organisation and the reason was ... a lot of the staff within those organisations she was related to and she wanted to have that degree of privacy ... and separation, so she didn't want them supporting, delving into the issues ... that she and I were talking about and trying to address. She didn't want to involve the whole extended family ... because she knew involving one of those people from those organisations that it would get around the family everyone would know ... because that was the cultural norm ... you get together around the kitchen table and it's who's doing what ... and she knew that her privacy would not be respected in that fashion. So, I completely honoured that and found her a different service ... They would have really given her a hard time if they knew ... the issues around her tenancy that ... she was sharing with me ...

she would have been hugely shamed and probably even more so ostracised from them than what she was already experiencing, because I think the family members and extended family members usually know when someone is not travelling as well as they used to or probably could.

Gail suggested that the absence of confidentiality in professional practice impeded Indigenous clients' uptake of services, she argued:

a lot of Indigenous people don't like to engage with Indigenous services ... I think it is because it is the Murri grapevine, everyone will end up knowing ... there is that stigma that everyone will end up knowing your business ... there's no confidentiality.

These excerpts indicate how the perception that Indigenous organisations discuss and share tenants' information with members within and outside of the organisation prevents some Indigenous peoples from accessing culturally-specific support. However, for many, the benefit of accessing culturally specific support is more important than breaches of confidentiality within some organisations. For example, Ruby claimed:

I have had tenants say to me can you find me some cultural specific support, counselling ... and I've gone yeh because some of what they were going through was extended family business ... and they just knew that only an Indigenous person would understand ... fully what they were going through and maybe would offer her the best way forward and so in those cases I have been able to source culturally specific ... counsellors ... [it's]... not easy ... [to find that support] ... and I think that's always been a disappointment of mine that there just doesn't seem to be enough culturally specific support across a whole range of needs .... they experience all the same issues as everybody else as well as the cultural expectation placed on them ... so I just don't find there's enough breadth of the services available that can also provide that other layer ... of cultural need you know ... because it is quite a different culture to my culture ... and many other Australians ... there needs to be a greater breadth of services around ... so we can help support that tenant population I think.

Ruby's narrative clarifies the difficulties that she, and many metropolitan service providers within the study's cohort, had accessing culturally-specific services for Indigenous tenants.

Potentially, this could be a factor that shapes respondents' professional practice and how they interact with Indigenous tenants.

## 8.9 Professional practice and interactions

Without exception in the heterogeneity cohort cultural knowledges and race capital of respondents fundamentally informed their professional interactions with Indigenous homeless individuals and their tenant population. They predominantly advocated for a case-by-case approach to ascertain the specific needs of Indigenous tenants and demonstrated an understanding of how navigating Indigenous cultural obligations within the parameters of tenancy requirements is often tricky for Indigenous clients. Most respondents enacted direct and empathetic approaches. For example, Meredith claimed, 'I'm just straight up front with them you know what I mean ... just to the point really; this is what we need to do ... your tenancy is at risk, what can we do to help?' Shannon shared how:

I always think ... treat people with respect and ... you'll get the same back ... it doesn't matter ... who's coming through your door, I ... [have] grown up with that cultural background ... respect is given ... your eldest to youngest ... so don't look at them any other way ... you're going to find people that aren't gunna be always so polite and kind but ... a kind word usually can change that whole mode of somebody ... like even though they can be abrupt ... just talking nice to them they can sometimes come off ... we've had people come in very abrupt and ... you say oh come on let's go sit down and have a talk and you have that discussion with them and like it comes back to listening to what they have to say ... they leave a happy tenant.

For Polly, her approach was to ask:

the basic questions, what do you need help with? .... So really asking them first and listening and sometimes that question could be asked for a week, a month because you have got to build the trust ... you've got to, the clients want to feel that they can trust you with their information. Some of them have either told their story so many times and not seen the results that they wanted or they've fallen short ... we do recognise that they've been in the system or they've been disadvantaged for a while and they're not in a hurry to just ... let everything out. We also acknowledge that sometimes clients will say what they think you want to

hear, so really making sure that you build that relationship before you go probing in and trying to save the day ... you know in a respectful way I think is what tends to work ... really it again comes down to asking the right questions.

Hannah offered her comprehensive and considered thoughts on her professional practice and the way she interacted with homeless and tenant populations, suggesting:

ways to communicate the situation that I think it is going to be more easy for them to palate than other ways ... not everyone is aware of that... they don't have the time or ... because everyone is so busy ... you can't sort of say we are on an even playing field ... my values are different ... and my life experience ... I've never been homeless ... and also you know ... paying my bills on time has been drummed into me from an early age ... and I'm not dealing with a whole lot of other issues that are survival based ... but the higher our work load gets the harder it is ... because we have ... increased performance requirements ... and it just allows for less communication and that communication and that relationship building is essential ... in helping people feel like you have got their best interest at heart ... if they don't feel it if they are not aware if it ... they are going to be more difficult to get on side ... and negotiate with ... if the demographic of housing managers in social housing become real estate agents who ... may not have experience in that area ... it is not going to be very social justice based ... and to me ... it all comes back to social justice ... it's starting to make me cry, injustice for someone to be forced to live on the streets just because of their values ... it's wrong.

Hannah was visibly upset when articulating her impassioned considerations of the unfairness of someone being forced to live on the streets because of their values. This sense of injustice appeared to underpin her professional interactions. Hannah was one of the few respondents who reflected on the hierarchal significance of her social, economic and professional capital within her interactions, thus enabling her to contrast those understandings with what she perceived were the lack of resources available to most of her tenant population. The respondents in the hierarchy category reflected upon their individualised professional interactions with Indigenous tenants, as well as demonstrating their understanding of the impact of white Euro-Australian normative standards on Indigenous clients. For example, Michael suggested within his professional practice he was mindful that, 'there are some

cultural differences’, however he perceived the main issues for Indigenous peoples were that, ‘they have been left out of the society, excluded from the system’, reflecting that, ‘some of them have a very compelling story’. The notion that Indigenous peoples were excluded from the system and the consequences of discrimination was a large part of many respondents’ experiential understandings of the housing sector and moreover, the effect this had for Indigenous homeless and tenant populations.

## 8.10 Exclusion from private rentals

Respondents drew attention to the many forms of discrimination and exclusion that Indigenous peoples experience, and the difficulties respondents had in mitigating the consequences of these experiences. Most respondents articulated examples of how they encountered overtly discriminatory practices in both the private real estate and social housing sectors. For example, Tricia shared:

sometimes real estate agents aren’t very accommodating ... if you are Aboriginal and have got four kids I’m sorry you go to the bottom of the list whether you’ve got the best job in town or not because they can be choosy to who they actually tenant to ... we had a young fellow here who works ... and gets quite good money he ... had to move out of his rental property. He had been there for five years, the owner was renovating and going to put it back on the market. He couldn’t get a tenancy... and I said to him brother what are you doing wrong? ... he said I’ve applied for 40 houses in this area ... I said I’ll tell you what to ... you need to send your wife in because she is a white lady and you need to lose one child. He said what, I said three children look a whole lot better than four, oh he said well what am I going to do with the kid? ... I said just don’t put him on your form, oh he said, ok. So, he goes away and three weeks later I ran into him and I said how you going brother? ... he said hey I did what you said ... and I got housed, he said it’s not the best house in town ... but I got housed ... she had to say she had a partner and they earned a decent income but they only had three children.

All respondents acknowledged that large Indigenous families experienced discrimination in the private and public housing sector, and this was partly due to preconceived judgements that properties will be damaged and the size of the family will create maintenance issues for

organisations and service providers. Michael offered an alternate understanding, suggesting it was not the:

number of the children that make your house destroyed ... but it is how you look after your children ... you can have 10 people stay in house ... without even causing any destruction ... you can have one child who is not properly looked after who can ... cause destruction that is far worse than many people living there.

Ella's narrative identified her exposure to discriminatory practice in the private housing sector and she also suggested that, on occasion, Indigenous tenants may contribute to the discrimination through their behaviours, pointing to the ramifications for the tenants and the organisation:

there's all sorts of bias, you know if she's a single woman ... there's bias, they're Indigenous they're bias, they're ... Non-English speaking background people ... they don't want to house and if you have a big family they don't want to house you so private market does have a lot of restrictions ... it's not easy for us to transition people into private rental ... and sadly sometimes we really try hard and get them in ... and our clients let us down as well ... do the wrong thing ... some of the real estate agents are really good we have tried hard and ... when they let us down like that you know ... it's not always ... that all the real estate agents are bad, there are some real estate agents that are really good ... Sometimes the clients too don't meet the requirement ... and then the second time ... the real estate agent is reluctant because it is someone else's home ... it's somebody else's investment.

Meredith explained how discrimination towards Indigenous peoples was not exclusive to the private rental market, and provided the example of how a worker within her organisation exhibited pejorative assumptions around a potential Indigenous tenant. For Meredith, her need to directly address this was evident in her retelling of the story.

a woman had come in and she smelt of alcohol ... [and the] ... housing worker, oh I'm not housing her because ... she hasn't disclosed her alcoholism and I'm thinking who are you to, to make judgements to say she is an alcoholic to start with ... I got really ... cross about that ... my hands were flying all over the place

and all that sort of stuff ... and I obviously haven't let go of it because I am talking about it still ... to make that judgement I'm thinking this woman could be ... highly anxious ... with an anxiety disorder, she's gone to the pub and just downed two largies ... just in order to come to ... be interviewed for a house, but how can you make judgements ... how do you know that she's an alcoholic ... and if she is, we house alcoholics (laughs ) ... some people need a pill you know ... a valium to ... leave the house, some people can't leave the house ... I've haven't let go of it ... that's the kind of attitudes ... I'm dealing with ... I address it straight away ... I don't let that sit ... and we talk about it ... but you know folks out there they exist ... they're out and about ... hopefully there is only a small number ... really, really, tiny small number ... of those people but I ... won't allow that at ... [the organisation] ... I just won't have a bar of it ... If I see anything like that type of behaviour that is anything like that then I'll knock it on the head ... pretty much straight away ... because I won't tolerate any of that.

Clearly, Meredith in her supervisory capacity, had some ability to address potentially discriminatory practices, however for some respondents endeavouring to address discrimination in the private sector, was especially challenging. Deb clarified the systemic discrimination within the allocation process for private rentals and suggested this was not only disheartening for potential tenants, it is particularly frustrating for service providers as well. Deb explained:

there was a woman with four kids ... she would have applied for 25 properties and she had income because she had four children ... she wasn't black listed ... she had references ... we couldn't see what the problem could possibly be from a real estate's agents point of view unless it was the four small children ... she ... didn't get one and eventually she was offered a community housing property ... it just wears them down ... they're filling out these forms and the information that real estate agencies require on a rental form is phenomenal ... two rental references and then a minimum of two references who aren't your relatives ... and sometimes they're like ... I don't know who to put and sometimes we say to them ... do you have an aunty that has got a different surname to you? ... just ring her and say they gunna ring her ... references is a big one because they may not have people's phone numbers or ... they might have rented privately 10 years

ago and being living with family for the last eight years ... and can't remember who it was or even the address.

As with all respondents, Indigenous people's experience of discrimination, particularly in the private market, exacerbated respondents' ability to offer alternate and potentially long term housing options outside the realm of social housing. Respondents identified that in both the private rental market and social housing field, white Eurocentric perceptions of overcrowding in Indigenous households, presented as problematic for tenancy options and outcomes.

### 8.11 Overcrowding and the risk to Indigenous tenancies

Whilst respondents accepted that crowded households posed significant challenges in managing Indigenous tenancies, many referred to their habitus to provide contexts around Indigenous tenants adhering to their cultural obligations. Gail asserted:

I'm Indigenous myself and so it is just a way of life for me to see ... x amount of people in one house ... I don't see it, in my upbringing I don't see it as overcrowding ... I see it as me and my mum, my Auntie, my cousins all in one house that's just the way we grow up ... but for people, who haven't had dealings with Indigenous clients they are just policy driven they see it as overcrowding and breach, the tenants got to be breached ... so I think it's a bit of ... a learning curve there for ... [those] who don't come from an Indigenous background or who haven't dealt with them ... just to know it is just a way of life or that's how we grow up.

Michael emphasised the richness and psycho-social benefits of sharing one's home with extended family members. He suggested:

living alone becomes a little bit ... stressful ... but when you are always with people you talk with people, you eat with many people together ... makes you feel part of the society ... and ... I guess it helps in reducing stress levels ... and I think sometimes you feel that it is very difficult for you but when you are with other people and you are telling your story you begin to hear far worse stories.

Rhianna took a pragmatic approach when thinking about the likelihood of Indigenous households being crowded and looked at ways of addressing it. She maintained:



it is going to happen in Indigenous housing all the time, that they have family come who never tell you when they are going to go ... always you just got to let them know that we do have rules and these are the reasons why and you know the safety issues, there's wear and tear on the house, there's all the rest of it ... but ... if they have a real problem ... sometimes they are happy to have a letter ... so they can say to family look ... real estate is on to me ... my housing is on to me you have got to head home soon ... so it gives them a reason ... to actually ... get rid of them (laughs).

Rhianna raised an interesting point, that many respondents across all dimensions of the continuum spoke of, the idea that some tenants needed assistance to ask family members to leave. Respondents claim that for some tenants, it was extremely difficult for them to ignore cultural obligations to host families and kin, and a letter from their housing provider was welcomed as an intervention strategy. Meredith discussed her personal experiences and how she shared these with Indigenous tenants having difficulties asking their families to leave. She explained:

I know all about family ... my family don't come knocking on my door they know that ... this is what I will do and this is what I won't do and ... those who know me well and they all do ... know I don't do madness in my home I don't do anything (laughs) ... these four walls is my sanctuary ... I don't have to deal with a real estate or anything, it's my place you know ... I'm paying for this, this little sanctuary ... it's peaceful and quiet and you know we don't do any shenanigans here ... so no one comes knocking you know (laughs).

Helen however struggled with the imposition of mainstream policy on determining what constitutes crowded Indigenous households:

I think the situations that concern me more are where there's no perception from the Indigenous family that there is overcrowding ... and that to me is an imposition of ... the Department of Housing's policies and procedures ... this one bedroom per child ... no one of my generation grew up like that ... in my culture...you were packed in like bloody sardines ... and I think for some Indigenous families it would be quite acceptable for there to be a number of people sleeping out in the common area, and a few kids packed into the bed and

maybe not even any ownership around a particular room ... but we wouldn't be ok with that ... and in that case it wouldn't be effective because they'd be saying well what overcrowding ... this is how we live ... and we don't want to say to people well actually you know we think that's really ok it's a gorgeous example of inclusion however in private rental that will not be tolerated ... so ... you know ... what do we do with that as well?

Helen's narrative highlights the dissonance between some respondents' professional practice and their habitus. For many, their experiential understandings of home included extended family and thereby experiences of crowding were normalised within their habitus, yet professional expectations required that respondents imposed restrictions and in some cases punitive measures to combat overcrowding. Furthermore, by applying discretion to issues of overcrowding, some respondents, like Helen, were left questioning whether their approaches limit Indigenous tenants' capacity to navigate the broader housing system and abilities to procure and sustain positive tenancy outcomes.

## 8.12 The application of discretionary power

Despite respondents in the heterogeneity category being constrained by organisational requirements and mainstream housing policy agenda, the majority of respondents in this category employed considerable discretionary power when addressing issues such as crowded Indigenous households. Meredith captured the approach taken by many respondents, when she suggested that:

some people can fly, not a lot ... under the radar ... with extended families and ... you ... go and do an inspection ... there's another family living here (laughs) it's like oh ok ... oh yeh they've been here for a few months, ok alright ... but if the neighbours are not complaining ... if everyone's maintaining the house and not running amok ... in the neighbourhood ... people will fly under the radar.

In the main, respondents expect that 'most Indigenous families ... have someone else come in for a while ... and then go ... come and go ... and you've got to accept it, that's their family and if their family is in town they will stay at your house' (Tricia). Helen suggested that leniency and flexibility within interactions working with Indigenous tenants was vital because:

I think just having some understanding and some empathy around what an extraordinary journey this last 150 years has been for these folk is good ... in itself I think ... to know that and feel sorry you know for what's happened ... that's the philosophical sort of stuff how do we weave that now into how we work with people to get good outcomes ... how do we... how can we do that ... can we accept that there are different ways of doing things and different ways we can look at things ... can we accept that if it's not very clean it doesn't matter... there's a couple of a skinny dogs it doesn't matter ... can we accept that ever ... or not ... how do we do that ?

While most respondents preferred to provide some flexibility around issues such as crowding within their management of Indigenous tenancies, many narratives resonated with Polly's assertions that:

at the same time we have a job to do ... to uphold the ... legislation and the agreement that they've signed, so that's what we use ... the fact is we do have this lease agreement and it says it's only for you it's in your name ... so that means you're responsible for whatever happens in this house ... you pretty much need to ensure ... that no one else is coming in and spoiling it for you or damaging because the problem becomes yours ... they go ... but it's alright, and we say it's really not alright because it will cost you money, it will give you a record ... and really drawing out the negative consequences ... also using ourselves as examples ... we are doing the same we have a lease and if I want to bring x amount of family members I need to inform my real estate agent ... so making them understand ... it's across the board we all do this and we have to do it ... and giving them the options to know people can visit people ... for x amount of time but they cannot live permanently because of the problems it brings ... these are the rules they have to live by, so it causes a lot of friction.

Polly's narrative exemplifies the nexus between cultural norms and service provision expectations. One mechanism widely proclaimed in housing policy as a potential mechanism to address this cultural impasse is culturally responsive training and I present respondents' views on this in the following section.

### 8.13 Effectiveness of cultural responsive training programs

Respondents' appraisal of the culturally responsive training programs they had participated in differed considerably, however one key factor, was how the programs were delivered.

Meredith thought the training was beneficial suggesting:

I don't think it can hurt ... it is an opportunity for people to ask questions if ... they always wanted to know something ... they mightn't feel comfortable asking me ... they might ... want to ... get out there and hear someone else's story ... somebody yarnning ... that can always help and they start some thinking oh ok it's like that is it ... that's what it's always about ... just someone up there sharing a story ... can open people's minds up ... If you think about things differently it's just something like that ... you know some people don't have Indigenous friends or anything ... no contact whatsoever ... they might have some of these burning questions, where do I go, who do I ask? ... I've always been curious ... I just don't want to Google that ... I would rather talk to a person, start yarnning ... I always find that's the best approach.

Meredith also pointed out her frustration of being asked to organise cultural responsive training programs for the organisation and shared her reluctance to be responsible for it:

I shouldn't have to initiate that ... I don't want to ... initiate it ... like it's no big phenomena to ring up someone and say hey can you come speak or do this for whoever? ... there's facilitators out there it's no big deal, ring around ... phone a friend ... pay them you know a few hundred bucks ... feed them lunch (laughs) ... It's no big deal to do that but ... the conversation was ... a few years ago ... someone in my work ... [asked me] ... to do something and I was like well no ... you do something ... you white fellas get there and make it happen ... Have a conversation with somebody ... book it in, lock it in.

Gail rolled her eyes as she responded to the question of whether she had attended cultural responsive training programs. She stated:

I have been to about three cultural awareness trainings and there was only one that I was really engaged in and thought this is great ... the facilitator he was just excellent I mean he didn't teach me anything I didn't already know ... but the

story, the way he told his story and the way he delivered his training it ... really captivated me ... the... last two that I had been to ... I switched off I think I was doing more doodling in my workbook than I was listening ... and they are Indigenous presenters but I think for any training whether it's cultural awareness or ... how to do rent assessment you have to engage your audience and the last two people I went to they didn't engage me at all ... I was just switching off completely.

Doreen did qualify her opinions suggesting that for some service providers:

I think they would have skilled people that had no idea at all ... but I think they really need to have someone who, oh look it is so hard to tell who would be the right people to teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ... culture because it's different for each family really but ... I think the only way you are going to learn is if you live it or live amongst it ... and deal with it ... there are just things you can't learn from a text book ... or out of a training session.

For Kathleen, training programs were an opportunity to:

see ... other people within the industry who may not have the same experience as I do have ... their reaction, their views and ... basically it's good it's opening you up to think about how the other workers will see the situation ... and what they've expected ... because I rely on ... their reports to me ... and you know to jumble is this the real issue or is it just their interpretation of how they see it ... not all the people that are working in the same industry has the same view ... and experience and everything ... I can at least understand oh ok maybe the person does not have so much of the experience of dealing with them so ... then ... it's nothing personal ... It helps to understand the other workers as well ... yeh not just the clients.

Polly accessed the training program she attended as:

I feel that it could have been more ... targeted towards ... [the local] ... cultural group ... and that's ... the feedback I got back from some of the staff ... because we all know ... that Australia had a very diverse Indigenous and Torres Strait just because you're under the same name doesn't mean your practices are ... very

similar you know what I mean. I think if they can sort of structure it to ... tell us more about the ... [local] ... traditional owners, what they value and ... that sort of stuff ... think that would have been good ... because we sort of interact a lot with traditional owners or residents from here and there. It would be good just to get that history and understanding ... so you actually appreciate more and understand the history ... of the land where we are now meeting and working sort of thing.

Ella deemed culturally responsive training programs to be detrimental to her authentic interactions with her client population. She explained that after a decade with her organisation:

we had this session ... and they were talking about all these things about how you shouldn't, make eye contact and you shouldn't do this ... honestly I was so gobsmacked, I was saying oh my god I didn't know anything about these things and I said look I am actually glad that I didn't know ... because I would have been more worried about my body language. I would never have interacted genuinely with people ... so I think as much as people make ... all these things out ... as culturally you should do, people generally can read you ... whether you are genuine to them or ... whether you really care about their wellbeing ... I think once they realise that all those barriers just melt down.

Whether respondents perceived training programs to be beneficial or potentially detrimental to service provision, many agreed the programs needed to be specifically targeted to the local Indigenous population, emphasising the cultural diversity that existed within and between their Indigenous tenant populations. Most respondents advocated for the inclusion of Indigenous members of the community to construct and deliver the programs as an opportunity for the sharing of locale-specific cultural mores and knowledges.

## 8.14 Conclusion

This chapter has presented how respondents in the heterogeneity category integrated understandings of diverse cultural norms and standards to explore notions of difference. In these explorations respondents drew heavily upon their habitus and race capital to understand how white hegemonic normative values and expectations shaped Indigenous people's experiences of discrimination and exclusion within the field of social housing service

provision. Participants from Indigenous and cultural minority backgrounds often used their subjective experiences of racism, and their intrinsic understandings of cultural obligations and mores to place cultural contexts around the tensions and conflicts often present in their frontline interactions with Indigenous homeless and tenant populations. Whilst respondents' economic, political, social and cultural capital varied significantly from that of their tenant population, inevitably, they 'tapped' into their experiential understandings of the implicit value of culture to direct their interactions with Indigenous clients.

Respondents from Euro-Australian backgrounds also demonstrated a deep appreciation for the vitality of Indigenous people's cultural mores and practices and for many this had been developed through their engagement with Indigenous peoples outside the realm of service provision. This chapter has argued that for these respondents their vicarious experiential understandings of Indigenous people's experiences of marginalisation and discrimination inextricably shaped their interactions with their tenant population. However, often these understandings have inverse effects on how respondents implement their professional practices. Whilst they had a strong appreciation for the difficulties that many Indigenous tenants faced in adhering to their cultural norms and values within the structures of cultural and societal marginalisation, and more specifically within the social housing sector, for some respondents these weighty considerations inhibited their interactions with Indigenous clients. Many respondents felt they were less direct in their approach with Indigenous tenants.

Respondents' subjective habitus, race capital and professional experiences within the social housing field formed the bedrock of their accounts of how they interacted with Indigenous service users. Respondents identified the importance of understanding Indigenous culture in relation to white culture, not separate from it. They distinguished the importance, vibrancy and impact of cultural diversity as a source of privilege and disadvantage. The respondents in the heterogeneity category, explored the privileging and dominance of white cultural norms and values and contrasted these with the mores and responsibilities related to Indigenous cultures. Indigenous traditions and obligations were legitimated in these respondents' understandings of the cultural issues involved in their interactions with Indigenous clients and tenants. The heterogeneity category reflected respondents' beliefs that culture is intrinsically valuable to Indigenous people's identity and their daily lives.

In one form or another, respondents implicitly understood and felt the weight of racialised discrimination within their professional and subjective experiences. This was a critical point

in relation to how respondents implemented their discretionary power when dealing with cultural issues affecting successful housing outcomes for Indigenous tenants. Generally, respondents were willing to deviate from the rules and regulations that governed their organisations, especially when negotiating the issues raised by crowded Indigenous household, to mitigate the impact Indigenous tenants' cultural norms and obligations often have on their ability to maintain successful tenancies. Potentially, this leniency fostered better outcomes within the interactional space between respondents and tenants; however, some suggested it could have had an inverse effect and negatively impacted on Indigenous tenants' capacity to engage with other mainstream service providers.

The distinguishing feature of this category is respondents' inclusion of diverse cultural understandings within their comprehension of cultural differences. By making white culture visible, respondents were able to contextualise Indigenous tenants' disadvantage within the realms of white privilege and power. These understandings were critically important as potentially they provide a way forward that includes ideas of culturally adaptive service provision for Indigenous homeless and tenant populations. Chapter Nine describes the type and amount of discretionary power that respondents from all categories on the continuum of racial understandings of difference, utilise in their interactions with Indigenous service users and tenants.



## 9 Discretionary power

### 9.1 Introduction

This chapter presents findings that reveal how the meanings and values respondents attributed to cultural difference influenced the type and amount of discretionary power they chose to employ in negotiating social and cultural issues affecting tenancy management of Indigenous clients. The data clarifies the amalgam of respondents' subjective and professional biographies were key elements in determining the type and amount of discretion utilised within their professional practice.

These findings add to the cannon of research on discretion, by empirically supporting the view that 'individual interest ... beliefs [and] professional norms, and the process through which workers construct meaning in their daily work routine have an influence on their decisions' (Loyens & Maesschalck 2010: 72; Vinzant & Crothers 1998; Sandfort 2000; Winter 2001; Myers & Vorsanger 2003; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003). My findings advance these conclusions by demonstrating the role of race within 'choices' to enact discretionary power at the coalface of service provision. The critical point explored in this chapter is how respondents responded to and chose to enact discretionary power to deal with the tensions apparent in the contested and conflictual terrain where housing policy, organisational and service delivery objectives were profoundly incongruent with many of the cultural needs and norms of their Indigenous tenant populations.

### 9.2 Understanding discretionary power at the frontline

The concept of discretion has been widely defined, theorised and studied in various ways (see Lipsky, 1980; Galligan, 1990; Hawkins 1992; Baldwin, 1995; Marston & McDonald, 2006; Durose, 2011; Loyens & Maesschalck, 2010; Brodtkin, 2012). Discretion was conceptualised within this study as the culmination of service providers' power and choice 'the power to make choices between different courses of action or inaction' (Young, 1981: 33 cited in Ellis et al., 1999: 264). These choices materialised in the navigation and negotiation of policy and organisational directives and at the micro-interactional space of service provision. Housing workers occupied a critical position as providers of scarce resources for individuals facing extreme hardship. It became especially important to understand the actions of service providers working in the situational context where, in the main, their organisations were not

simply trying to meet the material needs of Indigenous tenants, they required Indigenous tenants to alter their behaviours, and ignore cultural obligations to receive accommodation and maintain their tenancies.

In this study, the choices respondents made to exercise discretionary power reflected the culmination of many factors. The following section presents how participants' subjectivities, professional expertise and the organisational culture in which they were situated, influenced their choices to enact discretionary power within their interpretations of policy regulations and organisational directives and tasks. These interpretations were significantly influenced by the value judgements service providers attributed to Indigenous culture and tenant populations. 'It is precisely in the encounter between different subjectivities, between different values, beliefs and interpretations' (Prior & Barnes, 2011: 268) that respondents indicated how their positions of power are constructed by 'insitutional forces that ... [hold] ... sway over them and cultural renderings of worthiness they ... [carry] ... with them' (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2012: 517). The following paragraphs explicate how the culmination of all these factors significantly influenced respondents' enactment of three specific types of discretion that were evidenced in the data, these being rule discretion, task discretion and value discretion (Taylor & Kelly, 2006).

### 9.3 Respondents implement rule discretion

The application of Taylor and Kelly's (2006: 631) understanding of rule discretion as 'bounded by legal, fiscal or organisation constraints', was employed to explore how respondents used discretionary power within their 'surrounding belt of restriction' (Dworkin, 1977: 31). Despite organisational variances, be it differentiation between state, community or Indigenous-specific housing services and differing tenure types, including crisis, transitional, or long term tenures, organisations and service providers alike are bound by the legislation of the Housing Act 2003 (Queensland Government 2003) and the Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008 (RTRAA: Queensland Government 2008). At the coalface service providers frequently found themselves in situations where they needed to make sense of the RTRAA rules and procedures, specifically in the context of mutual obligations, rights and expectations between themselves and tenants when negotiating the regulatory requirements of the Residential Tenancy Agreement (RTA).

Choices whether to apply discretionary power were evidenced primarily when respondents determined tenants were breaching their tenancy agreements. The Act states significant breaches need to occur before service providers action remedy breach notices. These breaches are related to any of the following:

- i) using the premises for an illegal purpose
- ii) the number of occupants allowed to reside in the premises
- iii) keeping a pet on the premises
- iv) another matter, if the reasonable cost of rectifying the matter exceeds a week's rent for the premise (RTRAA 2008: 129-30).

In the main, respondents' choice to use discretionary power to decide whether to action a remedy breach notice was at its most salient around, 'the number of occupants allowed to reside in the premises' (RTRAA, 2008: 129). Overwhelmingly, service providers perceived crowded Indigenous households as the predominant cultural issue that threatened the successful management of Indigenous tenancies. Respondents' choice to apply discretionary power played a pivotal role in the way they addressed issues of crowding, in some cases despite, and in most cases because of, the regulatory demands the tenancy agreements placed on them and their tenants. These practice discrepancies highlight that:

Even when the framework is apparently explicit and coherent, there is still room for practitioners to have some freedom of movement in how they exercise their judgement in translating policy into practice. Two approaches to discretion are particularly significant here: creatively interpreting the rules to create room for movement and denying that rules allow interpretation in order to reduce room for movement (Evan & Harris, 2004: 888).

The two approaches of discretion detailed by Evan and Harris (2004) are particularly evident in the way respondents sought to resolve the dissonance between Indigenous cultural demands and the demands of tenancy agreements. Respondents in the heterogeneity category articulated a degree of flexibility around increased occupants. Providing neighbours were not complaining and properties were not damaged, these respondents chose to let the issue 'go under the radar' (Meredith). Nonetheless, their flexibility was conditional in the sense that these situations were temporary and could only be sustained for a specific time on the proviso

that visitors remained relatively invisible. Respondents demonstrating degrees of flexibility were more likely to be from Indigenous or cultural minority backgrounds and/or displayed understandings of the importance of Indigenous cultural demands and reciprocity that often culminate in crowded households. These understandings provided them with culturally-specific contexts around their choice to action discretionary power to manage difficulties inherent in navigating resolutions for crowded Indigenous households and tenancy requirements.

Conversely, for those respondents in the hierarchy and the homogeneity category they demonstrated little, to no leniency around high occupancy numbers. Many of these respondents utilised the RTA rules and the regulations governing their organisations as a mechanism to *deny* their discretionary power in negotiating solutions to navigate the gap between cultural and regulatory demands. This approach effectively absolved them from personalising their decision to enact punitive measures to address crowded households. Respondents claimed to understand the cultural reasons underpinning crowded households and offered some empathy for Indigenous tenants' conflicted position of whether to adhere to their cultural obligations or conform to the demands of their tenancy agreement, however many noted 'I can't put up with it, obviously it's against rules, but I can understand how it happens' (Noreen). Respondents' discretion was also curtailed by the situational context of the type of tenancies they managed, especially in high density complexes where increasing numbers of visitors were particularly visible. High occupancy in complexes routinely resulted in a litany of neighbour complaints and service providers' perception of a heightened risk of property damage.

For those service providers who almost instantaneously implemented remedy breach notices to address high occupancy numbers in Indigenous households, significant commonalities existed between their subjective and professional biographies. For example, most of these respondents' come from a Euro-Australian cultural background and their personal and professional lives were relatively untouched by Indigenous friends and /or colleagues. These respondents also demonstrated hierarchal and homogenised understandings of cultural difference. They relied upon their positions of power as service providers to inform their understandings of Indigenous cultural norms and values. One respondent demonstrated her position of power when she recalled how she chose to issue a remedy breach notice because she believed her tenants were deliberately ignoring her telephone calls. While her strategy was particular to her situation her actions reveal the power of service providers' discretion to

impact tenancy outcomes in a policy environment where three remedy breach notices can result in eviction.

Aligned with other empirical observations (Ellis et al.,1999), these respondents rarely considered or legitimated the cultural needs of their tenants, rather they focused on managing their workflow according to their own priorities, which were, in the main, managing the overwhelming demands of their roles (Ellis et al. 1999: 276). Moreover, for many of these service providers the only room for movement when negotiating cultural practices that were perceived to pose a risk for tenancy sustainment, required Indigenous people to move away from or disregard their cultural norms and obligations to acquiesce to the policy and institutional directives, and service providers demands. Confronted by the chasm between Indigenous cultural norms and practice and policy and legislative requirements many participants inferred that the legal requirements of the Residential Tenancy Act (RTA) curtailed their discretion. However, those respondents that demonstrated heterogeneous understandings of cultural difference, they articulated all that was needed was a little creativity and flexibility to negotiate the needs of tenants within the parameters of the policy and organisational requirements.

The significant disparities in respondents' approaches to addressing crowdedness was also reflected in how respondents perceived their roles as service providers. For most respondents in the hierarchy and homogeneity categories, they strongly identified their roles as property managers, unless they were specifically employed as tenancy support workers. Alternatively, respondents in the heterogeneity category mostly defined themselves as tenancy officers /housing workers. Of those who defined themselves as property managers, their focus was primarily task oriented on managing and maintaining properties necessitating regular inspections, filling vacancies, managing rental arrears, and vigilant application of rules and regulations governing the social housing field. The welfare of the tenants within these properties appeared to be of secondary concern for these service providers.

Other respondents, who were employed as housing officers, often identified their roles as tenancy support workers, which illuminated their overriding professional priorities. These respondents often applied altruistic motives, with many of them advocating that helping people was their primary motivation for working in the housing sector. For example, those who identified predominately as 'property managers' applied little flexibility around crowded housing conditions, and for those who perceived themselves as 'tenancy officers' often

applied some discretion in their interactions around high occupancy numbers. For those respondents employed as tenancy support officers there appeared to be some flexibility in the way they addressed cultural practices and behaviours that were risking Indigenous tenancies.

Akin to other research findings (Miller 1977; Loyens & Maesschalck, 2010), respondents' narratives showcase strong correlations between their experience within the field and their propensity to deviate from organisational standards and rules. The intersectionality between experience and applying what appeared to be positive discretionary power on behalf of Indigenous service users and tenants, was especially important considering the immense scope between respondents' professional experiences. Some respondents in this study had been in the social housing industry for as little as three months, whilst for others they had up to 20 years industry experience.

The amount of time within the industry seemed to shape respondents' choices to apply discretionary power within the interactional space and/or conflictual tenancy situations. For example, there were strong links between service providers' limited experience and their choice not to action discretionary power, particularly for those service providers with less than two years experience. With limited experience in the sector and little to no prior engagement with Indigenous people and their cultural practices, many of these respondents lived and worked in an 'Indigenous free-zone' (Walter, 2012). These limitations appeared to influence participants' ability to build rapport and effective communication with many of their Indigenous clients. This impasse left many respondents with less alternatives other than to enforce tenancy rules to manage any issues posing a risk to Indigenous tenancies.

At the other end of the spectrum were respondents who were either from Indigenous or cultural minority backgrounds, or Euro-Australian service providers who had intimate relationships with Indigenous partners, colleagues and/or friends. Some of these respondents had up to 20 years industry experience, and it was noted that their experience equipped them with occupational knowledge of how, when and why to apply discretionary power that appeared unavailable to those with less experience.

The data revealed exemplars that showcase how experience and expertise influence service providers' choices to action rule discretion. They contended that 'bending like bamboo' and 'fitting the rules to people' (Helen), whilst taking into account situational circumstances and allowing tenants 'to pay whatever they could' (Jo) and being able 'to see the grey' (Gail) was best practice in the social housing milieu. On the other hand, the data also captured the

limitations of service providers with minimal experience suggesting that they ‘don’t know if they are allowed to bend’(Gail). These understandings of respondents’ choices to apply rule-discretion indicated that their ‘position, training and work shape the nature and expression of their agency’ (Maynard- Moody & Musheno, 2012: 518), and influence their interactions with Indigenous service users and tenants.

Interestingly, some respondents with significant experience advocated that applying discretion in negotiating cultural issues was detrimental to Indigenous tenants. They substantiated this by claiming discretion impedes Indigenous tenants’ acceptance of the need to conform to the regulations of their tenancy agreements. Many who subscribed to this view were concerned with how their use of discretionary power may foster Indigenous tenants’ expectations that all housing agencies and service providers will equally apply discretion and sensitivity of their cultural norms, values and practices. The consequences and implications of these expectations were deemed particularly worrying as respondents felt Indigenous tenants would be disempowered and vulnerable to negative tenancy experiences and outcomes. Interestingly, the service providers who held these concerns had considerable professional expertise and contrary to their counterparts, who used discretionary power to provide some flexibility around tenancy agreements and its rules, these respondents chose to use discretionary power to enforce the rules. These respondents justified these choices by explaining that they felt they were preparing and equipping Indigenous clients to successfully comply with their tenancy agreements within the broader social housing milieu.

Without exception, all respondents strongly asserted they were doing the best they could to implement the rules at the frontline under adverse circumstances, which necessitated them to develop techniques and routines to navigate the limits imposed upon them by the structure of their work (Lipsky, 1980). These limitations were characterised by the chronically inadequate resources relative to the tasks they are asked to perform. At the interface these situational contexts were articulated by service providers as compounding the tensions they faced in their day-to-day interactions with Indigenous tenants, which in effect significantly influenced the choices they made around their task- based interactions.

#### 9.4 Respondents use of task discretion

Identifiable tasks where service providers interact with service users are uniformly performed within the allocation process, sustainment and management, and in some cases, the evictions of tenancies. In this study, these interactions appeared to comprise ‘relative high degrees of

discretion and relative autonomy from organisational authority' (Lipsky, 1980: 13), with service providers interacting as 'individuals with individuals, in unobservable settings' (Evans & Harris, 2004: 878). At the interface, the majority of respondents were confronted daily with more clients than they could, literally, accommodate therefore they often choose 'those who seem most likely to succeed in terms of bureaucratic success criteria' (Lipsky, 1980: 107). This was strongly evidenced in the interviewing, assessment and allocation processes.

During the interviewing process, that required a standardised procedural assessment instrument, respondents were frequently required to discern who was the neediest and the most appropriate to allocate a property, making them the 'arbiters and definers of need and allocators of scarce resources' (Clapham, et al 2000: 81). These choices were made in the context of choosing from a population of the most 'needy'. Some respondents appeared to be slightly desensitised to the trauma of their clients' individual situations, potentially due to their daily exposure to trauma and the sheer volume of extreme social and cultural disadvantages they witness within their dealings with the Indigenous tenants and broader homeless population (Moran et al., 2016; Habibis et al., 2016a). Within these contexts respondents often stated that the standardised assessment procedures for allocating properties absolved them from making difficult choices and decisions. Sue explained:

we've got score sheets that we use ... and we have an interview procedure that we need to go through so even though you could make it a very personal decision ... based on how you feel about that individual ... you can't because you need to make sure that you're very transparent in your decision.

Sue's excerpt implied that she acts 'professionally by dispassionately gathering all the 'facts' of the case and implementing the appropriate procedure' (Clapham et al., 2010: 73). Whereas, for other respondents choosing the most needy from a pool of the neediest was emotionally distressing and an increasingly negative and demanding part of their daily practice. Ruby lamented that she had a particularly difficult time separating herself from the decision and saw the choice as:

you've got to decide between ... at any one time, a great number of very, very needy people ... [Potential tenants] ... divulge so much personal information ... about their circumstances so that people like myself and Department of Housing



staff can assess people against each other ... to work out who's has got the greatest need or not ... we are actually privy to a lot more information about their personal lives than we ever used to be ... because they have been advised by their support workers or whoever's referring them that this is really useful information so that ... [organisations] ... can actually pick you up against maybe six other people.

These narratives capture how some respondents found the standardised operating procedures helped reduce the complexity of decisions in their daily interactions. Potentially this relieved them from the heavy burden of responsibility that is involved in constantly making choices and a series of decisions (Loyens & Maesschalck, 2010) that profoundly affected the lives of Indigenous clients. For others 'working in settings of severe resource shortfalls ... the freedom to decide which one of a range of equally 'needy' people', is allocated a property is ... an unattractive option' (Evan & Harris, 2004: 889).

Respondents also exhibited considerable discretionary power when deciding the suitability of potential tenants for specific accommodation tenures. They spoke of the critical importance of tenancy mix, the idea of successfully combining individual personality traits, and more often individual 'problems' within the material structures and perceived 'personalities' of high density complexes, unit blocks, and neighbourhoods. Respondents inferred that high-density complexes in particular, had 'personalities' of their own and the inclusion of the 'wrong' personality or more specifically the wrong type of 'problem' could be disastrous.

Across the cohort, respondents displayed a high degree of freedom in determining who would be allocated and where, as they appeared to have the autonomy to do so. Decisions around tenancy mix are based on experiential professional expertise offering a guarantee that Indigenous clients' needs will be fairly accessed and available resources will be used efficiently (Dunér & Nordstöm, 2006). However, many respondents described situations similar to that explicated in the following excerpt, where clients' level of need and their position on the DoH wait list were secondary and surpassed by service providers' need to control the tenancy mix. This was determined through the identification of potential tenants' individual 'problems' and the collective 'problems' inherent within the complexes. Respondents consistently made decision not to allocate tenancies in the interest of the complex and the existing tenants within it.

While some service providers acted in ways that can be seen as discriminatory discretionary practice by ‘skipping over’ and excluding those within the homeless populations who were experiencing problems akin to many social housing tenants, the day-to-day practicalities and realities of managing complexes comprising large numbers of mainly disadvantaged individuals living in close proximity were challenging. Often tenants were experiencing varying degrees of physical and/or mental illnesses, together with alcohol and drug issues and societal disconnect and exclusion, which necessitated service providers enact discretion in the allocation process to prevent the risk of complexes imploding and ‘things going horribly wrong’(Meredith), not only for tenants and neighbourhood but for service providers and organisations as well.

The fallout for tenants, neighbourhoods and the implications for respondents responsible for inappropriate allocations were deemed extremely problematic. Many respondents spoke of the immeasurable amounts of time they spent addressing neighbour and neighbourhood complaints over ‘problem’ tenants, which in turn meant they were involved in trying to police and/or resolve the issue with the tenant or alternatively mediating between conflicting tenants and/or neighbours.

For most respondents, a collection of complaints revolving around a specific tenant motivated them to enact some form of intervention; however, when and how they intervene was another form of how they choose to action their discretionary power. Some respondents addressed complaints immediately and persistently until they were resolved whilst others ignored complaints until they deemed the situation ‘dangerous’. For most respondents, their responses are somewhere in between. Mostly respondents allowed space around complaints to ascertain the seriousness, validity and motivation underpinning the complaints before choosing to action an intervention. How they intervened also varied. Most addressed conflictual issues via telephone, some employed face-to-face interactions with tenants and others sent out formal remedy breach notices. Many service providers evaluated the benefits of effective intervention not only from tenants’ perspective but also from the organisations’ and service providers’ perspectives. Some spoke of the time and energy they invested in collaborations with other agencies, supporting tenants and getting them into positions where they were perceived to be safe. For these reasons, they were mindful of the decisions they made in addressing conflictual situations and the way those decisions were enacted.

Respondents' descriptions of frontline interactions exposed their micro-interactional use of discretionary power within the context of rules and occupational tasks, and provided clarity around the 'interrelated facets of their positions' (Lipsky, 1980: 13). Despite service providers' relative autonomy to action discretionary power, frontline interactions are always circumscribed by housing policy directives, their organisational culture, and occupational practices and norms (Evans & Harris, 2004).

Additionally, the type of housing and housing programs respondents provided, the number of tenancies they managed, the locations of housing stock and their organisational culture were instrumental in their abilities and freedom to use discretionary power to negotiate difficult tenancy issues. The relational aspects of these factors influenced service providers' ability to perform their tasks and navigate the complex tensions they faced. For example, most respondents in metropolitan settings managed several high-density complexes comprising Community Managed Studio Units (CMSU) which consisted of up to 40, one bedroom apartments usually with shared bathroom facilities. These tenures were predominately transitional and/or crisis accommodation, with most metropolitan service providers managing over 100 transitional tenancies. The nature of managing these tenures means service providers witnessed and controlled high tenancy numbers and considerable movement within and between properties.

Due in part to the siloed nature of many metropolitan organisations, most respondents had limited access to culturally-specific resources and interagency support for Indigenous tenants in transitional accommodation. All of this study's metropolitan respondents provided mainstream housing options for Indigenous tenants, indicating their practice was invariably constrained by policy demands inherent in the Housing Act (2003), the regulatory requirements of the DoH and the RTRRA (2008). Additionally, some metropolitan respondents managed the Community Rental Scheme (CRS) program requiring them to procure private affordable housing, from owners and/or real estate agencies, where effectively the organisation leased the private properties and sub-leased them to Indigenous tenants. These respondents navigated and regularly mediated the often messy and conflictual milieu between owners, real estate agents, tenants, service providers and social housing organisations.

Despite the differing tenure programs and accommodation respondents managed within the metropolitan setting there appeared to be little room for discretion to promote positive

interactions and outcomes for Indigenous tenants. Some of the factors contributing to this included respondents' time and resource constraints, the mainstreamed nature of the programs they delivered, the difficulties associated with tenants living in high density complexes, and the transient nature of the tenants which is perpetuated by the temporary nature of available accommodation. These factors presented multidimensional and complex issues for service providers and tenants to navigate.

In contrast, for many of those service providers located within regional organisations, they often managed medium to long term tenures in low density unit blocks or separate houses, and in some cases, they managed smaller tenancy numbers than their metropolitan counterparts. Regional respondents often worked in organisations with adjunct programs providing wrap around support to help tenants maintain their tenancies. For those managing long term tenancies, many had developed significant relationships with tenants which proved beneficial when negotiating difficult tenancy issues. Additionally, many service providers had local knowledge which enhanced their understandings and these experiential understandings were instrumental in how and when they chose to use discretionary power.

According to respondents' accounts, managing a smaller portfolio and having access to culturally-specific support and resources enhances opportunities for them to develop rapport with tenants. These working conditions created the space for respondents to consider all the factors at play for Indigenous tenants and the multiple ways to mitigate issues with support from culturally-specific agencies. However, not all regional service providers managed small tenancy numbers or provided long term accommodation options. For some, the tenancies they managed were comparable to metropolitan respondents, however the critical points of difference between metropolitan and regional service providers were twofold. Respondents in regional locations determined that culturally-specific resources were readily available, and subsequently accessed culturally-specific support for their tenants which took some pressure off the demands of their role. With cultural support, these respondents could access local cultural knowledges which played a significant role in the way they enacted their discretionary power and how they navigated the clash between tenancy rules and many Indigenous tenants' cultural practices.

Respondents' interpretation and implementation of top-down policies within their frontline practices were not only influenced by organisational culture and demands, they were also largely determined by their own views and attitudes. As with other empirical findings

(Clapham et al., 2000), respondents' attitudes and values strongly influenced the ways in which they constructed their interactions with tenants, especially when faced with situations that they did not have the skills or the time to deal with. Many respondents, especially in the hierarchical and homogeneity categories, relied on hegemonic cultural norms and the racial understandings and values derived from their own habitus to make sense of the issues at hand, which in turn influenced and constructed their value-discretion (Taylor & Kelly, 2006), and its implementation within their professional interactions.

## 9.5 Respondents use of value discretion

The adaptation of Taylor and Kelly's (2006) conceptualisation of value discretion was applied to analyse the findings and to tease out how respondents' subjective and professional values and judgements were instrumental in their choices of how, when and why discretionary power is applied to conflictual tenancy situations. For Taylor and Kelly (2006: 631) value discretion is 'potentially determined by notions of fairness or justice and can involve professional and organisational codes of conduct and ethics'. Aligned with Lipsky's analysis (1980: 108) this study also determines that respondents find 'greater gratification in interacting with some clients than others', noting that 'some clients simply evoke sympathy or hostility' (Lipsky 1980: 108). Whilst open hostility towards Indigenous clients and tenants was rarely overt in respondents' narratives, there was evidence that some respondents favoured some Indigenous tenants over others, especially those that were perceived as 'good tenants'. Good tenants were overwhelmingly defined by their abilities to conform to tenancy rules; pay rent; maintain the property; keep the number of visitors small and keep the length of their stay to the fortnightly minimum. Due to many Indigenous tenants fulfilling their cultural reciprocity obligations, their ability to pay the rent, successfully maintain property and limit the number of visitors and the length of their stay was compromised, which effectively meant that many respondents perceived them as the 'bad' problematic tenant.

The analysis of the application of value discretion captures how respondents' decisions were often guided by judgements of the perceived moral worthiness of Indigenous culture, which was frequently juxtaposed against normative Euro-Australian values and assumptions. These formative assumptions played a pivotal role in shaping frontline interactions and denoted the intrinsically racialised nature of service provision. The notion of value discretion explains why some respondents 'were willing to make allowances for those individuals who they felt were deserving or whose behaviours they chose to overlook' (Hoyle, 2014: 199). For

example, some respondents were more inclined to ‘cut someone a little slack’ if they were looking for work, not just sitting around drinking all day’(Sean). Often respondents’ narratives provided rich evidence of how their values and judgements were actioned in ‘rather crude ways to produce and enforce dominant cultural norms’ (Maynard-Moody & Musheno 2012: 521). One respondent contended that her working-class background had equipped her with a work ethic and an appreciation of what she had *earned*, which was in stark contrast to her Indigenous tenants whom she perceived as ungrateful, complaining and expecting everything for nothing (Lauren). She conceded that she had difficulty in helping people that she perceived did not help themselves. The expressions of respondents’ discretionary power were found to frequently conserve and reinforce hegemonic cultural beliefs about ‘worthy and unworthy, or safe and unsafe people’ (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2012: 521), regulated by judgements of who deserved access to their often-limited time and scarce resources.

For those respondents who predominantly understood cultural differences in the terms of a racialised hierarchy (see Chapter Six) with intrinsic ideologies of us and them, the perceived cultural supremacy of their Eurocentric values and norms outweighed and whitewashed the legitimacy of Indigenous cultural values and practices. These understandings dominated how they chose to action discretionary power within their interactions. Most of these respondents pejoratively judged Indigenous lifestyles and cultural norms and attributed little to no cultural legitimacy to issues affecting Indigenous tenancy outcomes. Many spoke of the perceived deficit of Indigeneity and presented this as strong evidence of why Indigenous people should assimilate to the cultural rules and values of the broader Euro-Australian society. Their value discretion was most striking when they spoke of the worthiness of Indigenous people for tenancy allocations, judging them as incapable of sustaining tenancies and clearly identifying that they were not ‘suited to our sort of housing’ (Lynne). These evaluations effectively meant respondents activated their value discretion to justify why they avoided housing Indigenous clients. The underlying inference was that Indigenous clients were not ready to be housed in mainstream settings with respondents concluding that other, often non-Indigenous tenants, were more deserving of their time and effort due to their perceived notions that Indigenous tenancies were destined to fail.

For some respondents, their subjective understandings of cultural differences were constructed by dominant ideologies of homogeneity (see Chapter Seven) and were shaped by values of respect and egalitarianism *regardless* of cultural differences. These service

providers appeared to be driven by altruistic motives and were drawn to working in the field of social housing services because they were strongly motivated to help others. Their egalitarian understandings framed the way they actioned their discretionary power to negotiate difficult tenancy issues within the interactional space. For these respondents, the values they held around notions of an equal homogenised humanity impelled them to employ respectful and bidirectional interactions. Respondents articulated the value of building rapport to help deal with conflictual issues, and this was the realm in which their value discretion was apparent. Respondents judged that their tenants had the necessary human capital to bring about changes to their circumstances, whilst acknowledging that many also required help and additional support. With these fundamental ideologies underpinning their practice, they chose to facilitate mutually-collaborative, interpersonal interactions in the negotiation of tenancy difficulties.

Those respondents who understood, valued and appreciated the critical importance of Indigenous cultural norms and practices for Indigenous tenants embraced notions of cultural heterogeneity (see Chapter Eight). Their own lives were positively enhanced by their lived experiences of being ‘cultured’ or as a result of intimate relationships with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. For some, their day-to-day realities are full of experiences of racial discrimination and exclusion, therefore their professional practice was closely bound with intrinsic experiential understandings of the many issues that affected Indigenous tenant populations. These respondents identified with their tenant populations by legitimating tenants’ cultural needs and practices and acknowledged the tensions and interplay between these and organisational regulatory demands within the provision of service delivery. For some respondents, their own cultural identity appeared to foster direct communications to negotiate with and for Indigenous tenants. These respondents appeared to genuinely feel ‘the common ground between themselves and their clients’ (Casey & Allen, 2004: 407). For others, their social justice practice values and ethos alongside their cognisance of the historic and contemporary imposition of white Euro-Australian culture on Indigenous peoples per se and their tenants specifically, inhibited their abilities to engage in direct communication to address cultural issues affecting Indigenous tenancies. Most of these respondent, their value discretion constrained their practice which did little to enhance effective interactions to address the impasse between Indigenous cultural norms and values and the demands of mainstream tenancy agreements.

## 9.6 Conclusion

This chapter depicts the similarities and differences in how respondents chose to use their discretionary power. The findings provide a glimpse of the complexities service providers face in their day-to-day frontline practice with Indigenous clients and tenants. The choice whether to apply discretionary power played a significant role in the way Indigenous tenants were engaged with at the frontline and during the process of navigating conflictual tenancy issues. Despite the varying ways respondents used discretion and the drivers that promote or inhibited its application; its use was always circumscribed by the ubiquity of mainstream housing policy, legislation and organisational requirements. Undoubtedly policies and procedures are crucial in practice, nevertheless service providers frequently found themselves in circumstances where they had to make sense of the rules and procedures in situational contexts where there is little to no room to accommodate the needs of their tenant population. Respondent's use of discretionary power was, in the main, regulated and restricted to the micro-interactional space of service provision. The findings capture how, why and when respondents' discretionary power was applied and suggests the use of discretion is significant in shaping and affecting interactions at the interface between service providers, service users and tenants.

The following chapter answers the study's research question by drawing upon the respondents' understandings to illuminate some of the ways in which racial sameness and difference between service providers and Indigenous tenants impacted social housing service provision on the frontline.



## **10 Conclusions on the role of race in social housing service provision**

### **10.1 Introduction**

The key concern of this thesis was to explore the role of race in shaping social housing service providers' understandings of cultural difference and how these understandings influence their professional interactions with Indigenous service users and tenants. The application of the racial labyrinth of subjectivities and professional practice (see Chapter Four) to analyse the interview data provided explanations for how respondents' racialised personal and professional biographies intersect with the structural and institutional forces of the social housing field. Findings show respondents' understanding of cultural difference or sameness impacts how they negotiate and interpret the rules governing their social housing fields, and shapes their decisions and engagement with Indigenous service users and clients.

Lipsky (1980: 28) found in his study of street-level bureaucrats, a term he coined to refer to individuals who work in the public sector, 'an important element ... inherent to the work of street-level bureaucrats is the presence of discretion. Policy makers and economists might wish it were otherwise, but it seems clear that in the implementation of social welfare programs there remains an irreducible extent to which worker discretion cannot be eradicated'. Lipsky (2010: xvii) speaks of a 'paradoxical reality' where he distinguishes between 'policy as written and 'policy as performed'. The work of street-level bureaucrats is highly scripted and conversely it requires 'improvisation and responsiveness to the individual' (Lipsky (2010: xvii).

The term 'street-level bureaucracy' itself embodies this paradox: 'How to treat all citizens alike in their claims on government, and how at the same time to be responsive to the individual case when appropriate' ... Lipsky acknowledges that discretion will vary according to the nature of the street-level tasks at hand. The greater the degree of discretion, the more salient is such an analysis in understanding the character of worker's behaviour. Although hence characterised as a 'relative concept', discretion is 'difficult, if not impossible' to reduce (Hupe, 2013: 431.

Respondents' interpretation of housing policy agendas and organisational directives and the choices they made within the implementation of the rules, together with their engagement

with Indigenous service users and clients highlights the role of discretionary power at the interface of social housing service delivery.

The findings of my research demonstrate how social housing service providers work in the 'space between' their own subjective values, housing policy directives and institutional requirements in delivering housing services to Indigenous clients. This involves them negotiating the potential 'risk' that Indigenous cultural demands and responsibilities presented for the management of Indigenous tenancies. This 'risk' was framed up within the demands and limitations of mainstream housing policy agendas that required Indigenous tenants to adopt lifestyle choices and behaviours that were more reflective of the broader white society. This was a significant finding, even for those respondents working in ICHOs. Whilst these respondents potentially had more flexibility to negotiate Indigenous tenants' cultural responsibilities and obligations within their management of tenancies, the constraints of mainstream housing policy regulations were also evident within their organisations.

My findings suggested that limited flexibility for Indigenous cultural practices within mainstream housing policy regulations and organisational objectives points to power white normative standards have in shaping Indigenous tenants' housing outcomes. The findings illuminated how the uncontested and embedded nature of white cultural hegemony created the largely invisible racial standard that governed respondents' delivery of social housing services to Indigenous service users and tenants.

It is through the examination of respondents' understandings of race identity and cultural difference that this thesis contributes to theoretical scholarship that places white normative values and assumptions at the centre of Indigenous marginalisation and disadvantage, thereby disrupting unidimensional understandings of race inequality. The inclusion of whiteness in the social category of race contests its assumptions of being the normative, invisible and often uncontested benchmark for Indigenous peoples to be measured against (Frankenberg, 1993; Moreton-Robinson, 2004).

## 10.2 The role of race within interactions

Two-thirds of participants in this study were Euro-Australians and the findings show mostly they do not perceive themselves as having a racialised identity that impacted on their professional interactions with Indigenous homeless and tenant populations. For most of these

respondents, the conflict and tension often presented within their management of Indigenous tenants were predominantly attributed to Indigenous people's failure to assimilate to white neoliberal housing policy demands and tenancy requirements. These assumptions situated unsuccessful tenancy outcomes as the sole responsibility of non-conforming Indigenous tenants. Overwhelmingly, respondents equated Indigenous cultural norms and practices as a distinct problem for tenancy management. This standpoint fundamentally shaped how they managed issues such as crowded Indigenous households, rent arrears, neighbour complaints and property damage. Many respondents failed to recognise the importance of cultural practices and obligations for their Indigenous tenants, which effectively meant they rarely recognised the 'cultured' nature of many of the tenancy issues they were dealing with. This was especially apparent in the way some Euro-Australian housing officers dealt with issues such as crowded Indigenous households, successions of tenancies and judgements they made around tenants' living arrangements.

Not all Euro-Australian respondents were unaware of their racialised identity. Some were reflexive about their racial privileges and the impact this had on their professional interactions with Indigenous service users and tenants (see Chapter Eight). Much of these understandings were formed through their culturally diverse professional and/or personal social networks. Engagement with Indigenous peoples within and outside the housing sector appears to have broadened their knowledge around the legitimacy of Indigenous cultural practices and norms for Indigenous peoples. For many these understandings were perceived as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, understandings of the profound importance of culture for their Indigenous friends, colleagues and partners' lives promoted their respectful and empathetic engagement with Indigenous tenants. On the other hand, professional interactions were often stifled by respondents' feelings of guilt over the historic legacy of Australia's race relations with Indigenous populations. The conflicting nexus between respondents' personal relationships with Indigenous people and society's treatment of them often culminated in respondents altering their professional practice.

The juxtaposition between real-life experiences, structural inequalities and professional practice was profoundly intensified within the narratives of respondents from Indigenous and cultural minority backgrounds. These respondents were implicitly cognisant of their racialised identity and its implications for their professional practice, providing them with intrinsic knowledges of the structural, institutional and systemic barriers facing Indigenous homeless and tenant populations. Nonetheless, for many respondents' they determined that to

procure and sustain Indigenous tenancies within mainstream housing provision required them to focus less on cultural difference and more on meeting the material needs of Indigenous homeless individuals and families. Most respondents in this study advocated that more support was required to help prevent Indigenous tenants falling out of housing. These findings align with other empirical research that identify the need for tenancy support programs and other tenancy support measures to help Indigenous tenants maintain their tenancies (see Habibis et al., 2007; Flatau et al., 2009; Milligan et al., 2011).

Reflecting upon the role of race within their professional practice, respondents from Indigenous and cultural minority backgrounds recognised they were enforcing policy demands incompatible with the intrinsic values and legitimacy of their own cultural norms and practice. However, their professional practice was oriented to getting on with the business of finding affordable accommodation for Indigenous peoples within the systemic constraints of mainstream housing options. Often this meant they were in the position of predominantly placing the imperatives of white normalising housing policy demands above the cultural needs of Indigenous tenants. This was rationalised by respondents' experience of the potential problems some cultural practices create for managing properties and securing tenancies for Indigenous homelessness populations. My findings about the challenges Indigenous cultural practices presented for service providers working with Indigenous clients in social housing are broadly reflected in other empirical Indigenous housing studies (see Habibis et al., 2007; Milligan et al. 2010; Milligan et al., 2011; Moran et al., 2016).

The considerable variation of how respondents understood the relationship between their racialised identity and professional practice points to the power of personal and professional biographies had in constituting these understandings. For most Euro-Australian respondents their racialised identities were subsumed under the invisible shroud of the dominant, unspoken white privileges that set the relatively uncontested normative standard. For respondents from Indigenous and cultural minority backgrounds their racialised identity was also constructed, in part, by the privileging of whiteness, however it was their polarised position to the hegemonic culture norm that was instrumental in shaping their professional practice. It impacted on the way they addressed tenancies issues such as crowding, rent arrears and neighbour complaints. Many respondents perceived the leniency they afforded around these issues to be beneficial for Indigenous tenants on the one hand and detrimental on the other hand. The clear benefits were that Indigenous tenants could engage in social and

cultural practices with a degree of freedom, however by allowing these potential tenancy agreement breaches to go under the radar, respondents suggested they were not helping to build Indigenous tenants' capacity to engage and negotiate with other housing workers and /or organisations that show little, to no leniency around such breaches.

My findings provide insight into how respondents perceived their racialised identities and constructed ideas of cultural difference. These understandings impacted on their professional practice in the intercultural context of service provision for Indigenous service users and tenants. Respondents' construction of cultural difference, evident in the hierarchy, homogeneity and heterogeneity categories on the continuum of racial understandings of difference was remarkably comparable to the three paradigms Frankenberg (1993) identified in her study (biological essentialism, color evasiveness and power evasiveness, and race cognizance). Despite the temporal, locale and cohort variances between the studies (Frankenberg's study was conducted in the late 1980s, with white middle-class American women), the similarities within the findings suggested the social construction of race *remains* a pervasive force in simultaneously re/creating individual, institutional and structural privilege and oppression. The following section explores the strategies respondents utilised to manage the influence of race within frontline interactions.

### 10.3 Managing the influence of race within frontline interactions

The management of race overwhelming manifested in respondents trying to convince Indigenous tenants to comply with organisational and tenancy requirements. Whilst some respondents and some organisations recognised the legitimacy of Indigenous cultural values and practice for their Indigenous tenants the nature of mainstream service provision allowed little room to accommodate these. Therefore, interactions were heavily weighted, with the resolution of tenancy issues necessitating tenants moved toward conforming to tenancy agreements and disregarding cultural norms and demands. My findings add to an increasing body of empirical literature that explores the impact Indigenous cultural mores and practices have for Indigenous tenants in sustaining successful social housing tenancies (see Hansen & Roche, 2003; Habibis et al., 2007; Prout, 2008; Moran et al., 2016).

The hegemony of white normative values and standards was rarely negotiated by respondents in this study, within their interactions with Indigenous service users and tenants. Whiteness remained privileged by policy objectivities, most organisational agendas and respondents' professional practice. Nonetheless, the way respondents engaged with tenants to address tenancy demands varied considerably, appearing to be contingent on a set of factors. These comprise respondents' racialised construction of culture differences, their professional position and experience within the social housing sector, the characteristics of their organisational culture and their social engagement with Indigenous people outside the realm of service provision.

### 10.3.1 Commonalities within hierarchy understandings

For those respondents, whose constructions of cultural difference reflect hierarchal understandings (see Chapter Six), the similarities amongst the key factors underpinning their management of race within interactions were noteworthy. Their professional practice was largely rule and task-oriented; and the potential explanations for this may be their limited experiences in the social housing sector (most had under two years within the social housing field), and the reality that they have little to no social engagement or experience with Indigenous friends, partners or colleagues. These respondents predominantly worked in metropolitan setting, and they were responsible for large tenancy portfolios, mainly consisting of transitional short term tenure options in high density complexes. When addressing tenancy issues, they relied almost exclusively on electronic or written communication. After the initial allocation process, face-to-face interactions with tenants rarely occurred, unless a tenancy management issue was deemed serious enough to warrant it. This mode of engagement reflected a depersonalised service delivery that was possibly problematic for engaging Indigenous tenants and appears to have, according to respondents, created communication barriers.

Respondents' organisational culture appears to have been fragmented and weak, as evident by the absence of respondents drawing upon a set of widely-shared beliefs and practice ethos that could positively guide the professional behaviour of staff. This situated the choices to enact discretionary power in dealing with difficult tenancy issues, within the individual realm of respondents' subjectivities, values and their professional expertise. Furthermore, the organisational milieu was mostly mono-cultural in its staff composition and respondents' capacity to access culturally-specific resources for Indigenous clients was limited. With these

factors at play, respondents' professional practice was underscored by racial subjectivities and primarily guided by mainstream policy and administrative demands.

For these respondents, examples of leniency around tenancy rules rarely occur, except when tenants' situational circumstances resonate with their subjective values and neo-liberal perception of success. The 'whiter' Indigenous tenants' behaviours and lifestyles were perceived to be-as reflected by both white neo-liberal perceptions of success, and the disregard of and separation from Indigenous cultural expectations- the more likely respondents displayed some empathy in their engagement with Indigenous tenants. Where organisational culture was fragmented and weak, the choices respondents made in addressing tenancies issues were largely left to the value-discretion of individual respondents, raising serious questions around the consistency and equity in housing service delivery and the implication of these for Indigenous tenant populations.

### 10.3.2 Commonalities within homogeneity understandings

For those respondents, whose constructions of cultural difference reflected homogenous understandings (see Chapter Six) there are many contrasts within the key factors influencing their management of race within their interactions. Some were task-oriented whilst others were people-oriented. Some had significant (over five years) whilst others had limited experiences (under two years) in the social housing sector. Most had some form of engagement with an Indigenous colleague and some respondents had relationships with Indigenous partners and friends. Collectively, they advocated for face-to face interactions as the best approach to engage Indigenous tenants when dealing with any difficulties arising from tenancy management. They perceived the egalitarian beliefs guiding their practice and interactions created a service milieu where Indigenous homeless and tenant populations had equal opportunities to procure accommodation. While the intention to treat all tenants equally has merit, often notions of equality obscured understandings of how Indigenous people's experiences of systemic racial inequality impacted on their abilities and choices to engage with organisations delivering mainstream housing options.

Most of these respondents were Euro-Australians working in mainstream metropolitan settings. They were responsible for large tenancy portfolios comprising mainly short-term transitional accommodation within high density complexes and units. For those respondents in regional settings their portfolios were considerably smaller than their metropolitan counterparts, and comprised long term tenure options within houses and units. The

organisational culture in both settings was determined by respondents to influence their professional practice and guide their interactions with Indigenous homeless and tenant populations. Most respondents worked with a colleague/s from Indigenous or cultural minority backgrounds and shared how colleagues' cultural knowledges could help address the impact of race on interactions.

For many respondents in metropolitan settings accessing culturally-specific services for Indigenous tenants outside the organisation was considerably difficult which often resulted in their heavy reliance on Indigenous colleagues to provide advice on cultural norms and practices. This was often problematic for Indigenous respondents due to their already demanding workloads, including but not limited to, the time and resource constraints indicative of working within metropolitan mainstream housing organisations. In contrast, Euro-Australian respondents suggested their relationship with Indigenous colleagues and their colleagues' willingness to share understandings around cultural norms and practices were deeply valued and seen as supportive for their interactions with Indigenous tenants. This study aligns with other empirical studies (see Milligan et al., 2011; Flatau et al., 2009) that identify the importance of culturally diverse staff in social housing organisations to provide cultural responsive service provision for Indigenous tenants.

### 10.3.3 Commonalities within heterogeneity understandings

For those respondents, whose construction of cultural difference reflect heterogeneous understandings (see Chapter Eight), the similarities and differences in the way they managed race within their interactions were revealing. Collectively respondents were people-oriented and heavily focussed on personalised service delivery. Most had significant experience (over five years) in the social housing sector and all respondents had a combination of experiences either with Indigenous colleagues, intimate partners or friends. These respondents comprised people from Indigenous, Euro-Australian and cultural minority backgrounds.

Respondents from Indigenous and cultural minority backgrounds their intrinsic cultural knowledges often enabled them to challenge the validity of some Indigenous tenants' assertions that service delivery and /or frontline interactions were culturally inappropriate. Respondents suggested these understandings facilitated direct communication to address issues affecting tenancy sustainment. One persuasive strategy frequently used to address the lack of fit between Indigenous cultural obligations and tenancy requirements was for these respondents to relate their own experiences of negotiating hegemonic cultural demands



incongruent with their own cultural mores and practices. In doing so they captured their shared racialised experiences while reinforcing their professional agendas and provided some rationale for tenants to comply with the dominant cultural demands inherent within their tenancy agreements. Conversely, for those respondents from Euro-Australian backgrounds their management of race within their intercultural interactions was less direct and at times constrained, mainly due to their reluctance to perpetuate what was perceived by some as institutional violence against Indigenous homeless and tenant populations.

Over half of the respondents in the heterogeneity category worked for Indigenous housing organisations in regional settings. These organisations appeared to have a strong organisational culture that displayed widely-shared values that guided respondents' practice and engagement with Indigenous tenants. The established history of the organisation within the region, and the service delivery on the ground was unique, in the sense that it was about enhancing community. The idea of enhancing community within service provision was distinctive to these organisations. Respondents adopted a holistic approach to address the plethora of underlying issues that were obstructing successful tenancy engagement and housing outcomes. In the main, they were in the enviable position of having access to culturally-specific and wrap-around support services, frequently resulting in supported accommodation options for tenants, which was instrumental in managing many issues facing their Indigenous tenants. These organisations also comprised a mixture of culturally diverse staff which was lauded by some respondents as a key ingredient in delivering cultural sensitive services to Indigenous tenants. It was the sharing of understanding around differences within cultural knowledges and sensitivities that seemingly helped respondents to manage the impact of race on professional interactions.

Indigenous housing research literature (Baldry et al. 2006; Farelly & Lumby, 2009; Milligan et al., 2010) suggests in terms of the staff–client interface Indigenous people overwhelmingly prefer to deal with Indigenous staff when applying for or negotiating their services. Findings from this study tentatively suggest that organisations comprising staff from culturally diverse backgrounds offer the best formula for managing the power of race within intercultural interactions. The cultural diversity of staff appears to have provided Indigenous tenants with a choice of who they could engage with, and for those working within these organisations the sharing of cultural knowledges broadened their understanding and conceivably enhanced their professional practice and interactions with Indigenous service users and tenants. For those organisations with minimal (less than two) staff members from Indigenous or cultural

minority backgrounds, recruiting staff from a range of cultural backgrounds may alleviate the workload pressures for those Indigenous colleagues within these organisations.

## 10.4 Implications for policy and practice

The findings present three main implications for policy and practice. First, the current One Social Housing Policy (OSHS) milieu adopted by the Queensland government in 2005 (Habibis et al., 2016a) premised on homogenising and mainstreaming social housing options and service delivery, has unique implications for social housing service providers, and Indigenous homeless and tenant populations. To manage the overt privileging of white Euro-Australian normative assumptions and neoliberal values, inherent within housing policy formation, and its impacts at the interface of service provision, much research suggests, ‘that emerging social housing regulators actively promote a high standard of cultural competency in mainstream services’ (Milligan et al., 2010: 62). Whilst there is consensus for the need of cultural competency within service delivery to Indigenous populations (COAG 2009; Milligan 2010) achieving this appears to be more difficult. Culturally responsive training programs (CRTP) are widely recommended as a means to achieving this, however the respondents in this study suggest training programs were mostly ineffective in providing them with skills and knowledges they need to manage the cultural issues affecting tenancy sustainment (Proudfoot & Habibis, 2014).

Nearly two thirds of respondents had participated in some form of culturally responsive training. Many received this within educational settings rather than as part of their professional development. For Euro-Australian respondents, there were many challenges in understanding what culturally responsive service delivery meant and how they were to ‘develop the skills, knowledge and relationships they need in their work’ (Milligan et al. 2011: 88). Some respondents suggested that participation in CRTP challenged their notions of a homogenous Indigenous population, nonetheless this appears to have had little effect on their practice (Proudfoot & Habibis, 2014). For those respondents who did not access CRTP, many believed that they did not need to be trained on how to interact with Indigenous clients. However, for those who believed training would be beneficial, this was often rationalised as a commodity adding to their professional skill set, rather than an essential skill for their interactions with Indigenous clients and tenants. For some respondents, the knowledge garnered through CRTP inhibited their practice with Indigenous clients.

While others supported the philosophies of CRTP they found it difficult to weave what they had learned into their daily practice. Overall, respondents described CRTP at best, as providing some insight into the complexities of Indigenous cultures and reinforced existing cultural knowledge, and at worst, as ineffective to equip them with skills to enable culturally responsive interactions and detrimental to their professional practice with Indigenous clients. Mostly CRTP was seen to have little impact on practice and did not improve respondents' understandings of the factors influencing the behaviour of Indigenous clients. Some respondents proposed that the content needed to be more specifically targeted to their tenant population and this was congruent with findings revealed in other empirical research (see Milligan et al., 2011).

The gap between policy directives and the reality for respondents at the frontline of service provision has an entrenched and concerning presence within much empirical housing research (for example, Phillips et al. 2009; Milligan et al., 2010). If culturally responsive service delivery is understood as the delivery of services and programs that are consistent with cultural identity, meaning systems, communication styles and social networks of clients (Thomas 2002), based on my research, conceivably very few Indigenous clients, especially in metropolitan settings are experiencing culturally sensitive service provision.

The findings of this study suggest that housing organisations with strong organisational culture comprising staff from a range of culturally diverse backgrounds may be a more effective measure than CRTP in alleviating, to some degree, the impact of mainstream housing policy demands on Indigenous tenants and promoting culturally sensitive interactions at the frontline. Arguably, everyday exposure to the commonalities and differences within culturally diverse groups provides much deeper insight into the nuances of cultural values and norms than CRTP have been unable to do to date.

The second implication these findings have for policy is the need for a concerted effort to recruit and retain staff from various cultural backgrounds. This strategy may provide the cultural mix which is crucial for developing understandings of cultural difference at the organisational and individual levels, with the potential to affect the way services are delivered on the ground. Staffing in social housing is widely recognised as an important factor in culturally responsive service provision (Habibis et al., 2007; Flatau., et al., 2009 Milligan et al., 2011), however the challenge remains to combat the difficulties in recruiting

and maintaining staff, whilst securing the cultural skills and competencies required to manage complex issues affecting Indigenous homeless and tenant populations.

The third policy and practice implication from my research concerns occupational health and safety issues for respondents, including their physical safety, workload issues, the tensions between managing housing stock, supporting tenants and the emotional challenges of their role. Few respondents spoke of concerns around their physical safety within service provision and this was largely due to the reality that mostly, interactions with tenants were not face-to-face, they comprised predominately of electronic or written communication. The physical environments of most organisations include alarms, security swipe doors, locked down counter areas to provide a protective barrier between respondents and service users and tenants. If respondents provide outreach services to homeless populations or inspect properties for damage generally they are accompanied by another colleague.

Most respondents spoke of the emotionally taxing nature of their roles. They felt the pressure to meet administrative requirements, while also attempting to procure accommodation for Indigenous tenants in a milieu where tenants' needs far outweighed availability of housing stock. These frustrations were intensified by respondents' limited resources, including time, cultural skills and access to cultural-specific support, and shaped for many, an enduring sense of helplessness and for some a sense of apathy towards their professional practice. Often this was fuelled by experiences of unsuccessful tenancy outcomes. Respondents detailed the pressure of being providers of a scarce resource and being in the inevitable position of making the tough decisions of whom and where those resources were allocated. Furthermore, respondents spoke of the relentlessness of dealing with countless neighbour disputes. For many respondents, negotiating Indigenous tenants' cultural norms and practices added an extra degree of difficulty to an already demanding and complex role.

To successfully manage tenancy outcomes, respondents were required to identify the predominant issues affecting their tenants. Most respondents, especially in metropolitan settings, claimed they lacked the professional skills to establish the specificity of tenants' problems, suggesting the expertise of a social worker was required, not a housing service provider. The blurring of professional boundaries was a difficult terrain for them to navigate, not only with tenants but with support workers. Furthermore, if they did manage to ascertain specific issues often they were unable to find the necessary resources required to address them and help tenants.

Several respondents described their engagement with Indigenous tenants as emotionally draining; they perceived their interactions as having no real benefit for tenants mainly due to tenants' cultural practices superseding tenancy obligations and the lack of flexibility in policy agendas to accommodate Indigenous cultural needs. Despite this, most respondents constantly attempted to navigate the impasse between Indigenous cultural norms and practices and tenancy agreement expectations, whilst fulfilling the professional and administrative requirements of their role. However, as shown in other research (for example Flatau et al., 2009; Nethercote, 2012), the range of organisational issues identified in this study, including over-stretched resources, meant that respondents often failed to respond to the cultural needs of their Indigenous tenants.

Respondents spoke of the emotional challenges of dealing with a tenant population they had difficulties understanding. For some they demonstrated an undercurrent of disdain for Indigenous tenants' behaviour and the perceived way many occupied and maintained their properties. For others, who had intrinsic or vicarious understandings of the importance of cultural practices and obligations for Indigenous peoples, enforcing rules and regulations on a population that sits outside hegemonic cultural norms, proved, at times, to be an extremely conflicted position for them, largely resulting in a considerable amount of distress.

The implications of these findings for policy indicates the need for service providers to collaborate with specialised experts in areas of mental illness, drug and alcohol use and cultural issues affecting Indigenous tenants to lessen the onus on housing workers to delve into areas of tenants lives that they are professionally ill-equipped to deal with. If the administrative demands of tenancy management are reduced, service providers may be able to focus on building rapport with tenants and potentially deepen their understanding around Indigenous cultural norms and practices. These engagements may provide some context around behaviours that are problematic for successful management of Indigenous tenants. The findings suggest that flexibility for Indigenous cultural practices within policy regulations may ease the tensions and conflicts that are often present for service providers managing Indigenous tenancies.

## 10.5 The limitations of the study

A central strength of the thesis is the use of respondents' subjective and professional narratives to explore the intersection between their racial identities, the racial nature of

service provision and the construction of difference. Although the exploration of these understandings is a key strength of the study, the co-constructed racialised nature of the interview process may also be perceived as a central limitation. My Euro-Australian identity created a shared racial and social positioning in common with Euro-Australian respondents. Within co-constructed dialogue respondents and I explicated our white interpretations of Indigenous peoples and their cultural practices. For those respondents who relied on pejorative Indigenous stereotypes to collectively homogenise Indigenous peoples and cultures, they appeared comfortable to share those notions with ‘one of their own’.

My cognisance of the difference between my race position and that of Indigenous respondents and those from cultural minority backgrounds proved instrumental in shaping the way interviews were conducted. For example, when respondents spoke of their racial understandings of cultural differences, due to their experiences of being culturally ‘othered’, their experiential understandings and cultural legitimacy outweighed and surpassed my conceptual understandings of cultural differences. This dynamic stifled my deep investigation into narratives of race as I determined respondents’ understandings as legitimate and my own as subjective conjecture. I presumed that I did not have the race capital or expertise to robustly examine some respondents’ implicit cultural knowledge. My reasoning was that the critique and analysis of respondents’ perspectives through my lens of white values and normative assumptions would further emphasise my racial privileges and marginalise the voices of Indigenous and cultural minority respondents.

The sample was relatively small and the results are not generalizable. Despite the data analysis being conducted through instruments of whiteness, such as my societal, institutional and individual privileges, my deep commitment to social justice ensured a robust analysis of respondents’ subjectivities and professional practice. The findings make visible the entrenched racial interplay between identity, privilege and disadvantage and provide an account of how these race relations effect housing providers’ interactions with Indigenous tenant populations. The inclusion of Indigenous practitioners and those from cultural minority backgrounds gave voice to those respondents’ experiential understandings of being culturally ‘othered’ and how they navigate the white neoliberal requirements of the social housing field and service provision, with the intention that comparable data extends the analytical strength of the study.

This study may have been strengthened by the inclusion of Indigenous tenants' perspective however there are numerous studies that explore Indigenous people's experiences of the impacts and racial nature of white mainstream social housing service provision.

## 10.6 Future research direction

The study's findings are supportive of previous housing research identifying that, in the main, despite policy push and organisational procedures to deliver culturally sensitive services options for Indigenous peoples, these agendas appear to have limited impact on social housing service delivery within frontline interactions. Culturally responsive training programs are, generally, failing to provide service providers with the skills they need to engage effectively with Indigenous service users and tenants and to manage the social and cultural complexities inherent in many Indigenous tenants' lives. For CRTP to successfully offer housing workers the skills to deliver culturally responsive service provision, CRTP content may need to include strategies from psycho-social training programs (see Bennett 1986; Thomas 2000; Wells 2000), as these will help identify the construction of participants' cultural normative values and assumptions, and determine how these are operationalised and enacted within their professional interactions with culturally diverse tenant populations. Examining the centrality of one's own assumptions and values and exploring the relational interplay of cultures within service delivery may transcend the problematisation of cultural difference and create a space of understanding and empathy. Cultural difference can then become conceptualised as 'axes of differentiation' rather than different 'from' the hegemonic standard. Recognition that we all view the world through multi-positional cultural lenses potentially provides an additional frame of reference for respondents' negotiation of tenants' cultural needs and demands, in a policy and organisational milieu that has limited differentiation and flexibility in the face of cultural difference.

## 10.7 Conclusion

This thesis has made sociological inroads into understanding how the social category of race constructs understandings of cultural difference. Through explorations of respondents' cognisance of their own racial identity, and its influence on their professional practice with Indigenous service users and tenants, this thesis illuminates some of the ways racial similarities and differences between service providers, Indigenous service users and tenants impact on social housing service provision at the frontline. The findings suggest that critical

factors shaping interactions include whether the biography of service providers has included some direct communication and contact with Indigenous people, as well as the capacity and willingness of respondents to reflect on, and recognise the influence of their racial identities and cultural mores on their practice with Indigenous service users and tenants.

This chapter demonstrates how social housing service providers work in the ‘space between’ their own subjective values, housing policy directives and institutional requirements. This involves service providers negotiating the potential ‘risks’ that Indigenous tenants’ cultural demands and responsibilities present for the management of Indigenous tenants. The thesis points to how mainstream housing policies need to be adaptive to support positive housing outcomes for Indigenous tenants. Moreover, the findings suggest flexibility for Indigenous cultural practices within policy regulation may ease the tensions and conflicts often present for service providers managing Indigenous tenancies.

Respondents’ experiences of delivering services to Indigenous populations provides empirical strength to the significant role critical race theories can play to unveil the power of whiteness in creating and sustaining the stratification of race privilege and oppression within the realms of mainstream housing policy objectives, organisational directives and professional practice and interactions. This thesis contributes to theoretical scholarship that places white normative values and assumptions at the centre of Indigenous marginalisation and disadvantage, thereby disrupting unidimensional understandings of race inequality. The inclusion of whiteness in the social category of race contests its assumption of being the normative, invisible and often uncontested benchmark for Indigenous peoples to be measured against. By bringing the hegemony of white cultural assumptions to the fore, cultural difference can then be conceptualised as axes of differentiation rather than different ‘from’ the hegemonic standard. This is especially important in the Australian context where white mainstream policy objectives, organisational procedures and intercultural professional interactions continue to oppress and impact the daily lives and housing outcomes of Indigenous Australians.



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## Appendix One: Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Cultural Background	Geographic Setting	Organisations	Role	Experience in social housing field
Shannon	Female	Indigenous Australian	Regional	ICHO	Housing Officer	11yrs
Deb	Female	Euro-Australian	Regional	ICHO	Operational Supervisor	4yrs
Polly	Female	Cultural-minority	Regional	ICHO	Tenancy Support Worker	4yrs
Ella	Female	Cultural-minority	Regional	ICHO	Senior Manager	17yrs
Vanessa	Female	Euro-Australian	Metropolitan	CHO	Housing Officer	1.5yrs
Meredith	Female	Indigenous Australian	Metropolitan	CHO	Senior Manager	13yrs
Helen	Female	Euro-Australian	Metropolitan	CHO	Operational Supervisor	7yrs
Ruby	Female	Euro-Australian	Metropolitan	CHO	Operational Supervisor	8yrs
Tony	Male	Cultural-minority	Metropolitan	CHO	Operational Supervisor	4yrs
Noreen	Female	Euro-Australian	Metropolitan	CHO	Housing Officer	1.5yrs
Chris	Female	Euro-Australian	Metropolitan	CHO	Housing Officer	1yr
Rebekah	Female	Euro-Australian	Metropolitan	CHO	Housing Officer	1.5yrs
Neil	Male	Euro-Australian	Regional	CHO	Tenancy Support Officer	4yrs

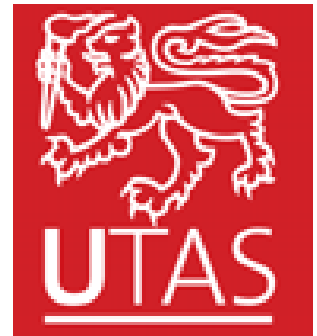
Julie	Female	Cultural-minority	Metropolitan	CHO	Housing Officer	10mths
Sue	Female	Euro-Australian	Metropolitan	CHO	Housing Officer	2yrs
Melinda	Female	Euro-Australian	Metropolitan	SHO	Operational Supervisor	4yrs
Gail	Female	Indigenous Australian	Metropolitan	SHO	Housing Officer	13yrs
Kathleen	Female	Cultural-minority	Metropolitan	CHO	Tenancy Support Officer	2yrs
Ian	Male	Euro-Australian	Metropolitan	CHO	Housing Officer	3mths
Hannah	Female	Euro-Australian	Metropolitan	CHO	Housing Officer	1.5yrs
Lauren	Female	Euro-Australian	Metropolitan	CHO	Housing Officer	9mths
Lynne	Female	Euro-Australian	Metropolitan	CHO	Housing Officer	4yrs
Tricia	Female	Indigenous Australian	Regional	ICHO	Senior Manager	20yrs
Rhianna	Female	Euro-Australian	Regional	ICHO	Housing Officer	18yrs
Paul	Male	Cultural-minority	Metropolitan	CHO	Housing Officer	4yrs
Katrina	Female	Euro-Australian	Regional	CHO	Housing Officer	2yrs
Lily	Female	Euro-Australian	Regional	CHO	Senior Manager	17yrs
Sean	Male	Euro-Australian	Regional	CHO	Housing Officer	1.5yrs
Wendy	Female	Euro-Australian	Regional	CHO	Housing Officer	4yrs
Michael	Male	Cultural-minority	Regional	CHO	Housing Officer	1.5yrs

Jo	Female	Euro-Australian	Regional	CHO	Housing Officer	2yrs
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## Appendix 2: Information Sheet

University of Tasmania  
School of Social Sciences  
Private Bag 1340 Launceston  
Tasmania 7250  
Australia



Telephone (03)6226 7487  
Facsimile (03)6324 3526  
[d.habibis@utas.edu.au](mailto:d.habibis@utas.edu.au)  
[www.utas.edu.au](http://www.utas.edu.au)

### Information Sheet

#### **The experiences of social housing tenancy officers managing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenancies**

**Chief Investigators:** Associate Professor Daphne Habibis, and Dr. Sonya Stanford,  
University of Tasmania.  
Interviewer: Fiona Proudfoot  
PhD Candidate  
School of Social Sciences  
University of Tasmania  
[Fiona.Proudfoot@utas.edu.au](mailto:Fiona.Proudfoot@utas.edu.au)



#### **Purpose of the Study**

This research is being conducted in partial fulfilment of Fiona's PhD, under the supervision of Associate Professor Daphne Habibis. Its purpose is to explore the experiences of tenancy officers working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants and the role of cultural identity in shaping these experiences. Social housing organisations are increasingly involved in providing services to ATSI clients but housing policy and practice is not always aligned with the values and practices of Indigenous tenants. It may help to understand how housing officers manage this, and the role their own cultural identity plays in this.

### **Why have I been invited to participate in this research?**

You have been identified as a potential respondent for this research as we believe you have relevant knowledge arising from your current or past position as a tenancy officer working with ATSI tenants.

### **What will my participation involve?**

You will be asked to participate in a one hour face-to-face interview covering the following topics:

- your experiences and understandings of front-line service provision with ATSI clients
- your understanding of cultural similarities and differences, between you and ATSI service users
- how you personally experience and negotiate any cultural similarities and differences
- your views on how the policies and operational procedures of your organisation influence these interactions and their outcomes
- the meanings, understandings and values you attach to culturally appropriate service delivery
- your experiences on how cultural similarities and differences influence the delivery of tenancy management services to ATSI service users and the impact this has on their tenancy sustainability

The interview will take place at your workplace at a mutually convenient time. Fiona will make notes and audio record the interview. You will have the opportunity to review and make changes to the transcript.

### **Are there any possible benefits from participation in this study?**

Fiona is keen to make your participation in the interview a rewarding experience.

Participation in the study may provide you with a useful opportunity to reflect on your experiences of working with ATSI tenants, the role that cultural background plays in this and the practice wisdom you have gained as a result. The study may produce findings that will inform the sector about how to improve the delivery of culturally appropriate services to ATSI tenants.

### **Are there any possible risks from participation in this study?**

It's important that you can feel as comfortable as possible discussing your work experiences and so, Fiona will take every care to take your needs into consideration. There are minimal risks associated with participation. It is possible that talking about your experiences of managing ATSI tenancies may cause you some discomfort. To ensure you are comfortable with your participation and to protect your anonymity and the confidentiality of the information you provide, the following measures will be taken:

- you may withdraw consent at any time and may refuse to answer any question
- you will be given the opportunity to review, amend or withdraw any material that you provide up to two months following completion of interviews
- if you feel any discomfort during the interview, Fiona will pause the interview and check if you are comfortable to continue
- the details of counselling services within your area and national counselling phone services will be provided. If there is anything else you need to feel comfortable please let Fiona know.

### **What if I change my mind during or after the study?**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Prior to the interview your consent to participate in the study will be evident by your signing of the consent form, however you can withdraw at any time regardless of the effect and without the need to provide any explanation. You may also withdraw data that you have supplied.

### **What will happen to the information when this study is over?**

All data will be kept in locked filing cabinets in the offices of Associate Professor Daphne Habibis or Fiona Proudfoot at the University of Tasmania campus. Digital information will be password protected or encrypted. All data will be destroyed in a secure manner five years after the date of any publications.

### **How will the results of the study be published?**

The results of the research will be disseminated through the publication of Fiona's PhD dissertation in mid 2015 and through peer-reviewed journals. The dissertation may be accessed at the University of Tasmania's library repository <http://www.utas.edu.au/library/>

You will be given the option to see a transcript of your interview and to view a draft of any sections of the PhD dissertation in which your contribution appears. You will not be identifiable in the publication of any results in relevant journal articles or the final publication of the PhD dissertation.

### **What if I have questions about this study?**

Should you have any questions about the study at any stage please contact by phone:

Associate Professor Daphne Habibis (03)6226 7487

Fiona Proudfoot (03)63243657

This study has been approved by the Tasmanian Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns of an ethical nature or complaints about the manner in which the project is conducted you may contact the Executive Officer of HREC (Tasmania) Network on (03) 6226 7479 or email [human.ethics@utas.edu.au](mailto:human.ethics@utas.edu.au). The Executive Officer is the person nominated to receive complaints from research participants. Ethics reference No: H12915.

This information sheet is yours to keep. If you choose to participate in the research please refer to this when signing the Consent Form.

### **Counselling services in the Brisbane CBD**

Jacqui Rochester, Registered Psychologist, Career Counsellor: (07) 3218 2756

Deborah Farrel, Counselling Psychologist: (07) 3218 2148

Lifeline-Brisbane-Client Services: (07) 3250 190

Centre for Human Potential: (07) 32111 117

Life Support: (07) 3123 4716

Gallang Place, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation (07) 3844 2283

Lifeline: 1311 14

Mensline: 1300 789 978

Infoline Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4936

### **For Yumba Meta participants the sheet will comprise the following information:**

Full Circle Psychology Counselling and Consultancy (07)47 55 44 33

Centacare Townsville Office (07)47 72 90 00

Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Health Services

(07) 47 59 40 00

Minding Family Townsville

(07)47 23 82 21

F.A.I.R Counselling

Mobile 0402 890 029

**National Phone Counselling Services:**

Lifeline

1311 14

Mensline

1300 789 978

Beyond Blue

1300 22 4936

**Thank you for considering participation in this study.**

## **Appendix 3: Consent Form**

### **CONSENT FORM: SERVICE PROVIDERS THE EXPERIENCE OF SOCIAL HOUSING OFFICERS PROVIDING TENANCY MANAGEMENT TO ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER TENANTS**

I have read and understood the 'Information Sheet' for this study.

1. I agree to take part in the research study named above.
2. The nature and possible effects of the study have been explained to me.
3. I understand that the study involves one hour face- to- face interview covering the following topics:
  - Understandings of the cultural differences, if any, between housing officers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service users.
  - Perceptions of cultural identity
  - The meanings, understandings and values attached to culturally appropriate service delivery
  - The role of culture in housing officers' professional practice with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service users
  - The strategies, if any, used by housing officers resulting in positive tenancy and management outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The interview will be audio recorded and you will have the opportunity to view and correct the transcript.

4. I understand there are minimal risks associated with participation. However, due to the sensitive nature of the study I will be provided with contact details of Counselling Services if I need to discuss concerns or issues arising from this study
5. I understand that all research data will be securely stored on the University of Tasmania premises for five years from the publication of the study results, and will then be destroyed
6. Any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
7. I understand that at any information I supply to the researcher(s) will be used only for the purposes of the research.

8. I understand that the results of the study will be published so that I cannot be identified as a participant.
9. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without any effect, and if I so wish may request that any data I have supplied to date be withdrawn from the research.

Participant's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Statement by Investigator**

☐ I have explained the project and the implications of participation in it to this volunteer and I believe that the consent is informed and that he/she understands the implications of participation.

If the Investigator has not had an opportunity to talk to participants prior to them participating, the following must be ticked.

☐ The participant has received the Information Sheet where my details have been provided so participants have had the opportunity to contact me prior to consenting to participate in this project.

Investigator's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

